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Wednesday, 13 September 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tonino Picula, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Picula (Croatia): Year after year, we gather under this universal roof to join our minds and resources in order to make the world a safer and more prosperous place — or, at least, one a little less burdened with all the troubles we have been trying to resolve for decades but have so far not succeeded in eradicating. Never before have we assembled in such numbers and extent in the span of just a few weeks — first the religious leaders, then the Parliamentarians, then the heads of State and Government and, finally, the representatives to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. Let us hope that this unprecedented congregation will not remain just a tribute to the dawn of the twenty-first century, but will emerge as a foundation for a better United Nations and a better world it has to serve.

When our heads of State met at the Millennium Summit earlier this month, they unanimously agreed on the importance of the United Nations for our common future. To say that the United Nations is the only Organization that brings together all the countries of the world would be stating the obvious, but we must never underestimate the simple fact that this is the only global Organization with universal membership and comprehensive scope that indeed belongs to all of us — to all the peoples of the world. This is where the ultimate strength of the United Nations lies. Unfortunately, we have too often failed to recognize this.

Some haunting facts should not be forgotten: the fact that 1 billion people in this world of ours live on less than $1 a day; the fact that 1 billion people do not have access to clean water; the fact that the last time the number of Security Council members was expanded was nearly four decades ago, at a time when the overall United Nations membership was almost half of its current size.

The United Nations must amount to more than a resolution or a decision, a plenary meeting or informal consultations. We all have to work together, to spare no effort to make the Organization more proficient, more effective and fully at the disposal of all its Member States. That is why Croatia welcomes the millennium report of the Secretary-General and shares his views on the need for action to adapt the functioning of the Organization to the challenges of the new century. There is a growing need and plenty of room for improvement along the lines of efficiency, transparency, equality and good governance. There is no room for excuses or for delaying reforms any further. The time for reform is now.

Croatia has been an active Member of the Organization since its international recognition as a sovereign State in the early 1990s. At that time, in spite

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of all our activities, Croatia was primarily the object of numerous peacekeeping operations and endless debates within the Security Council. Today, Croatia is a major generator of peace and stability in South-East Europe, an active promoter and facilitator of democracy in the region, a reliable partner and a member of numerous regional organizations and initiatives. We have not forgotten the difficult years when Croatia was on the receiving end of United Nations activities. Today, we stand ready to put our expertise gained in peacekeeping and other fields to the service of peace and democracy.

The experience of the homeland war, as well as the lessons learned during peacekeeping operations in Croatia, have served us well in Croatia's active engagement in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone. We are ready to expand our role in peacekeeping and to actively participate in its conceptual development. Croatia welcomes and will carefully study the recently published report of the Secretary-General on the reform of peace operations and the recommendations proposed.

Unfortunately, the number of incidents with tragic consequences involving members of peace missions all over the world is constantly increasing. Just few days ago, three members of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Atambua in West Timor were brutally killed. One of them was Pero Šimundža, a citizen of Croatia. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to him personally and to all peacekeepers whose tireless efforts cost them their lives in performing their noble tasks in the line of duty.

Croatia is currently a member of the Economic and Social Council, the central body of the United Nations. The increasing development of the Council as a forum for policy dialogue, together with its follow-up dimension of the major world conferences, adds important value to its work and puts a heavy workload on its members.

Croatia's international responsibilities start with those towards the region of South-East Europe. At the January elections, citizens of Croatia demonstrated their strong commitment to democratic values, respect for human and minority rights, the rule of law and economic reforms. They opted for broad changes that will bring them into the mainstream of the European integration processes.

The new Croatian Government is well aware of all the responsibilities it has undertaken and all the opportunities that are arising. We firmly believe that Croatia's leading role as a contributor to peace and security in the region of South-East Europe will considerably contribute to turning this part of Europe into an area of peace and prosperity.

In February, the Croatian Government adopted a programme that, as its primary goals, stresses democratic values, respect for human and minority rights, the return of refugees and displaced persons, good-neighbourly relations and integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The new Government is determined to fulfil all Croatia's ongoing international commitments and to assume new ones, if the need arises.

The elections in Croatia at the beginning of this year resulted in important changes. They provided for an increased level of human rights protection and media freedom, as well as the acceleration of the return process. Important legislative revisions in the field of the return of refugees have opened the door for the unimpeded return of all Croatian citizens, regardless of their ethnicity and without condition of reciprocity. All the citizens of Croatia stand equal before the law in terms of the reconstruction of their houses and all other return-related rights. The Government of Croatia will do its best to fully implement those laws.

Croatia is mindful of the fact that the return of refugees represents a necessary prerequisite for lasting stability in the region. In order to accelerate the process of return, the Croatian Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, has prepared a special return project for 16,500 persons, tailored to their needs. The necessary arrangements for the return of refugees to both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are to be made through central institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in line with the new Croatian policy towards that country. Additionally, to speed up the process of two-way return with Republika Srpska, the former Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska and I have signed a joint declaration on the facilitation of the return of refugees. Through this document, we have committed ourselves to enabling the return of 2,000 people from each side, as well as to exchanging information and adjusting procedures in that regard. I can proudly say that real progress in the return process has been achieved.

At the same time, I have to stress that the number of returns to Croatia by far exceeds the number of returns of Croats to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additional efforts have to be invested to speed up the return process of Croats and all others to Bosnia and Herzegovina. All the refugees have the right to return, but they also have a right to stay in the areas where they presently reside. For all those Bosnian Croats who wish to stay in Croatia, we have to provide appropriate help in finding new housing facilities.

The success of the return of refugees does not depend solely on political and legal parameters. It has to be accompanied by the development of the State economy and the local economy. The return process must be sustained by job opportunities, small- and medium-size enterprises, strengthening of the social fabric and adequate schools and health institutions, as well as better living conditions generally. Otherwise, we shall just turn returnees into economic migrants and they will be on the road once again.

Not a small part of legislative changes relates to the protection of human and minority rights in Croatia. The Croatian Government is of the opinion that the necessary preconditions have been met for excluding Croatia from the omnibus resolutions on the situation of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which have been adopted by both the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, and for the exclusion of Croatia from the mandate of the Special Rapporteur derived from the Commission's resolution.

Important recognition of the progress Croatia has made in respecting fundamental values of democracy, human rights and rule of law came recently from the Council of Europe. The Monitoring Committee of its Parliamentary Assembly concluded last Friday that Croatia has honoured its obligations and most of its commitments undertaken at the time of its accession to the Council of Europe in 1996. Consequently, we expect that the monitoring procedure will be formally closed at the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly, at the end of this month.

For the Croatian Government, cooperation with the International Tribunal in The Hague remains primarily a legal issue, not a political one. The Croatian State Parliament adopted the Declaration on Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in April, unambiguously affirming its support for the Tribunal, and this important document remains a framework for Croatia's policy towards the ICTY. It is our firm position that the guilt for the crimes committed must be individualized: no nation can be held collectively responsible for the crimes committed by war criminals claiming to act in its name. In order to improve the quality of cooperation with the ICTY, the Government Council for cooperation with the ICTY has been constituted and close working relations with the Tribunal established.

Promotion of good relations with its neighbours is Croatia's high-priority goal. In its programme, the Croatian Government clearly stipulated that its relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina are based on good-neighbourliness, equality and transparency. Croatia will continue to cooperate with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community in the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, which remains the foundation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's self-sustainability and the guarantee of the preservation of the national interests of its three constituent peoples. Croatia's policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina rests on full respect for the independence and sovereignty of that country.

Croatia sees this as the only way to a prosperous future for the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the care for whom remains our constitutional obligation. Croatia will continue to support Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it foresees doing this in a transparent way, in accordance with the Dayton Agreement and with a clear Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Transparent financing of the Croatian component of the Federation Army through the Standing Committee on Military Matters is only one of the steps aimed at enhancing the central institutions and concrete proof of the new Croatian policy towards Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The relations between Croatia and Serbia cannot be regarded outside the framework of the international isolation of the Milosević regime. Croatia is not questioning at all the need to continue the normalization process with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but its dynamics and substance will depend on the democratization of Serbia, which remains one of the necessary conditions for international and

economic stability in the region. Croatia hopes that the forthcoming elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will be conducted in a democratic way that reflects the true will of the people and that they will result in democratic changes. Bearing in mind the fact that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has been denied an opportunity to monitor the elections means that the elections could lose their international credibility. Still, Croatia wants to believe that Serbia will find a way to end the present situation and join the mainstream of the political and economic integration process in the region and Europe as a whole.

Croatia supports democratic developments in the Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro. An open, democratic, multi-ethnic, stable and economically viable Montenegro is in the interest of Croatia and of the region at large. In the course of this year a number of meetings have been held between the Croatian and Montenegrin officials at various levels, including the highest level. Two border crossings between Croatia and Montenegro are operating without impediment, and further steps for enhanced cooperation, especially economic ones, are under way. Croatia will continue to support the process of democratization that has already began in Montenegro and help in its opening towards Europe, firmly in line with the efforts of the international community.

Croatia remains seriously concerned about the present situation in Kosovo and continued violence, whose victims are both Albanians and the Serbs. We hope that efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) forces and civilian administration will be successful in bringing peace and stability to the region, as well as facilitating preconditions for the return of refugees.

One issue, however, stands out in regard to the stability and lasting security of the whole region. It is the question of succession of States created after the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

An important aspect of the succession problem is the question of membership of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the United Nations and other international organizations. The four successor States are of the opinion that this must be resolved in line with the already existing Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. That means that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia cannot automatically continue the membership of the former State in the United Nations, and therefore, that it should do what other successor States have done — apply for membership as the fifth successor. Moreover, the four successor States are of the opinion that the current practice in the United Nations should reflect the above-mentioned resolutions and be more consistent in that regard. Therefore, we call for immediate implementation of those resolutions and emphasize once again the importance of resolving the question of succession, despite the rejection by the present Federal Republic of Yugoslavia regime.

There are still a small number of United Nations military observers within the international borders of Croatia. Their performance in Prevlaka, the southernmost part of my country, has considerably contributed to the lasting solution to this problem, which is definitely one of security, not one of a territorial nature. Since 1992, Croatia has accepted the United Nations mandate on Prevlaka, with the last six-month extension on 15 July this year. The steady normalization of relations between Croatia and the democratic Government of Montenegro has considerably improved the situation on the ground and should serve as a bedrock for a lasting solution for Prevlaka. In approaching the Prevlaka issue one has to respect existing international borders, as well as legitimate security concerns, land ownership rights and the need for economic cooperation and development in the region.

The stability of South-East Europe is an inseparable part of the overall European stability architecture. Being at the same time a Central European, Mediterranean, Danubian and South-East European country, Croatia plays an active role in several regional initiatives that serve as a foundation for stabilization, cooperation and development in our part of the world. Let me mention in this regard the Central European Initiative, one of the oldest regional initiatives, and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the newest.

During its chairmanship of the Working Community of the Danube Region this year, Croatia will host the traditional Conference of the heads of the regional Governments as well as the Economic and Cultural Forum. Alpe Adria is another subregional initiative in which Croatia plays an active role. Croatia's role as an active observer in the South-East

Europe Cooperation Initiative additionally emphasizes our intention to contribute to regional security and stability.

From the very outset, Croatia has actively engaged in the creation and implementation of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. This strategic process represents a comprehensive approach towards the region in which the concept of stability includes democratization and human rights, economic development and security issues. Croatia has presented several project proposals to all three working tables of the Stability Pact, the construction of the Adriatic-Ionian highway being the most important of them. The construction of this highway, stretching along the coastline from the Italian to the Greek border, would mean a significant improvement in road travel between the countries of the region, and would also bring economic development to the very part of the region that most dearly needs it.

I have the satisfaction of informing the Assembly that at the beginning of this week Croatia hosted the parliamentary summit of the Stability Pact, which had complete success in strengthening the important parliamentary dimensions of the Pact.

The Stability Pact also serves as a mechanism for facilitating the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership prospects for all those countries of South-East Europe that wish to pursue this path. Croatia is one of them. Full integration into the EU and NATO is the priority strategic objective of Croatian foreign policy.

In a brief span of six months Croatia's international position regarding the European Union has thoroughly changed. It has gone from being a country with no institutional relations with the European Union to a country awaiting the start of negotiations on a stabilization and association agreement and, consequently, candidacy for EU membership. Croatia is very pleased with the results of the joint consultative task force, whose recommendations helped us to prepare the start of the negotiations on the stabilization and association agreement. We are encouraged by the European Commission high representative's statements that this generation of agreements will be tailored according to the present needs and achievements of the stabilization and association process countries, and that countries' further progress towards European Union membership will be assessed on their individual merits.

In late November Croatia will host a summit of the European Union member States and the stabilization and association process countries — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. We feel privileged to host such a historic meeting, one that will signify the importance that the European Union attaches to the region within the framework of the Union's enlargement process. At the top of the Zagreb summit's agenda will be the issue of opening EU prospects to the region and the countries of South-East Europe. This is firmly in line with the policy of creating one Europe without walls or curtains of division. We see the arrival of the EU heads of State or Government to Zagreb as a tribute to Croatia's democratic achievements and a harbinger of our status of country associated with the European Union.

In May Croatia entered the Partnership for Peace. This provided Croatia with an opportunity to contribute more actively to the peace and security of the region and to strengthen its democracy and stability at the same time. In parallel, Croatia has begun the substantial reconstruction and modernization of its armed forces, aiming to meet all NATO requirements as well as democratic standards.

Croatia continues its active engagement in the pivotal European organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. It has achieved significant progress in working together with the OSCE on the improvement of security in the Danubian region through the engagement of OSCE civilian police monitors there, as well as in other fields of cooperation, such as the improvement of democratic standards in Croatia.

World peace does not depend solely on peace and security in Europe. It is with concern that we look at the ongoing threat of new crises on the African continent, where tremendous amounts of human resources and money are feeding the war machines, instead of serving to fuel development. The cause of our special concern lies in the fact that many armed conflicts in Africa erupt encouraged by and with the participation of neighbouring countries, often using foreign mercenaries who sometimes come even from Eastern European countries. Croatia sees the implementation of the Non-Aligned Movement

principles, as well as of the principles of the Organization of African Unity and other, subregional organizations, as an important element in the political developments in that part of the world.

These organizations undertake commendable efforts in order to establish mechanisms for conflict prevention, as well as to find the ways to end the ongoing crises. These efforts include the establishment of their own peacekeeping forces. In this regard, Croatia welcomes the determination of the African countries to solve their problems regionally and with support from the United Nations.

The situation in the Middle East continues to shift between the brink of war and the brink of peace. The peace process between the Israeli and Palestinian sides must be maintained, and all of us should spare no effort to extend assistance and support to the accomplishment of this paramount task. From its own experience, Croatia is well aware of how important it is to strengthen the peace process through Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that are supportive of it, both in language and in political substance. Thus, Croatia advocates that forthcoming resolutions on the Middle East reflect all the aspects of the ongoing peace process, serving as an important impetus for its successful completion.

Croatia is a country highly contaminated by antipersonnel landmines, with about 1 million landmines scattered over many parts of its territory. Their presence poses serious obstacle to the economic development of the country, and even more so to the return of people to their homes. The mine-clearing process is under way, but it has to be intensified if real progress is to be seen anytime soon. Many of the ongoing activities are performed in cooperation with donor countries, to which we extend our sincere gratitude; but maximum efforts have to be made to eliminate this evil completely and for good. In this connection, Croatia calls for further international assistance so as to enable the unimpeded development of the country at large.

Let me briefly address the issue of the reform of the Security Council. Croatia holds the view that the present structure and functioning of the Security Council does not properly reflect the reality of international relations in the twenty-first century, or the need for universal democratization. We support increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent seats in the Council, taking into account equitable geographical distribution as well as contributions to the United Nations budget. However, reform must go beyond the sole issue of membership enlargement. The Council's methods of work should be made more transparent, in particular regarding informal consultations, which have proved to be anything but informal.

The subject of greatest concern is that, with the advent of globalization, the number of people that are marginalized and strongly affected by its negative effects is growing. Therefore, we have to minimize the negative impacts of globalization and, at the same time, make its benefits available to all.

The effects of globalization on the international economy are significant and call for enhanced cooperation through multilateral institutions. In addition to the efforts aimed at avoiding marginalization and at ensuring full integration into the world economy, the countries with economies in transition face challenges associated with privatization and structural and macroeconomic reforms. In the case of Croatia there is an additional challenge, that of the post-war recovery. In such circumstances, our pivotal goal is to consolidate economic recovery and create conditions for sound and sustainable economic and social development. Our overall economic programme and policy measures are designed to support further economic stability, with stable prices and low inflation, concurrent economic growth, a faster rate of employment and more exports.

To attract foreign investments that are so important for the ongoing process of development, a new Investment Law has been adopted. Constructive economic cooperation on bilateral, regional and global levels remains Croatia's firm goal. Croatia has recently signed the Protocol of Accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and, within a few months, once the process of ratification is completed, Croatia will become a full member of the WTO.

The challenges facing the Organization are numerous. Answers will have to be found for questions regarding how to renew the structure and mandates of the main United Nations bodies, how to ensure better management and mobilization of new resources, how to define new forms of partnership, both with the private sector and with non-governmental organizations, how to make cooperation more effective

and, above all, how to turn the United Nations into a result-based Organization. Croatia believes in the potentials of the United Nations and considers that it will be made truly efficient if we — the Member States — accept our responsibilities towards it.

Croatia is ready to work together with all international actors in searching for the right answers to the challenges that lie ahead. Stability and prosperity of the world will become possible only if we never stop looking for ways to improve them. Croatia will continue to use its best efforts to preserve the positive trends in its general achievements and to contribute to European and world stability.

In conclusion, allow me to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia and the President of the fifty-fourth session of the Assembly, on his dedicated work and on the great skills with which he performed his demanding job. I would also like to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri, Foreign Minister of Finland, on his election as President of the fifty-fifth session and to wish him all success in his future work.

Finally, I would like to express the hope that this Millennium Assembly will result in new commitments that will bring progress in responding to the challenges of the new century.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, His Excellency, Mr. Louis Michel.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I should first of all like to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I wish you every success in this task which is both difficult and inspiring.

Allow me to include in this tribute the Secretary-General who has a crucial role in promoting international cooperation for peace, security, justice and development in the world.

I fully associate myself with the speech made by my French colleague, Mr. Hubert Vedrine, on behalf of the European Union. His declaration covered quite broadly European concerns regarding different regions of the world and the crises they continue to experience. Like my European colleagues, I will confine myself to repeating the encouragements of the European Union for the Israelis and Palestinians to seize this historic opportunity now within their reach to conclude a framework agreement in the coming weeks.

The new century is a blank page. It depends on us and on our Organization to provide the appropriate answers to the challenges inherited from the past century. The Heads of State and Government who gathered here for the Millennium Summit set forth the objectives that will mobilize our energy for the coming years. I will only mention three of our highest priorities.

First, world peace. This is the primary responsibility of the Security Council. It is therefore essential to bring the ongoing reforms to a successful conclusion and to improve the Council's legitimacy as well as its representative character. To adapt the Security Council to the evolution of the world is the primary condition for its ability to respond to our expectations. Belgium coordinates a group of ten small and medium-sized countries in the quest for constructive compromise formulas. Regarding the enlargement of the Security Council, the creation of ten new seats, five permanent and five non-permanent, with an equitable geographical distribution, seems to us to be a path worth exploring. As for the right of veto, we have put forward a number of concrete and moderate proposals seeking a voluntary and partial limitation to the right of veto. Such a reform, a balanced one along these lines and responding to the wishes of most Member States can, and should make significant progress in the months to come.

Secondly, the elimination of poverty and attainment of sustainable development. The globalization of the economy must proceed hand in hand with job creation and economic take-off in the poorest regions as well as with universally recognized social and environmental norms. There is no more denying that great inequalities, differences in development, the lack of good governance and disregard for human rights are factors which create instability, both within States and among States in their international relations.

Thirdly, the defence and promotion of democracy and human rights. For us this requires equal participation of men and women in public life and decision-making, as well as the fight against all forms of racism, intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia.

Serious violations of human rights and universal values must therefore never be allowed to go unpunished.

This also implies a permanent quest for the conditions, modalities and terms that underlie common human values. Democracy — and on this at least we should all agree — is much more than a statement of fact regarding an established balance of power or an arithmetic majority. It is a political morality that includes loyal electoral behaviour. It is respect for, and encouragement of the open expression of differing points of view. It is a frame of mind based on a lofty and optimistic conception of the human being.

I say this because, even at home in our old European democracies which one would consider safe and sheltered, we see reappearing the vile spectre of rejection of differences, exclusion and xenophobic or slanderous prejudice.

European parties are again raising and exalting what is most sordid and most barbarous in human nature. Saying nothing or resigning oneself to this fact is tantamount to trivializing the phenomenon and trivialization means corruption of the spirit.

I say this also because we must recognize that our political systems, in theory well equipped to withstand such assaults, unfortunately tend all too often to give in to the temptation to minimalize them under the specious invocation of so-called higher demands of realpolitik.

It is not my purpose here to allege some moral superiority but simply to remind ourselves that history always exacts a price when one refuses to learn from its lessons.

Belgium has participated over the past decade in numerous peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations, among others in Somalia, Rwanda and in the Balkans.

Reviewing these experiences, the Belgian Senate issued a detailed report in December 1997 containing recommendations that prefigure, to some extent, the recommendations contained in the Brahimi report. I will point out a few aspects on which there is complete convergence between the two reports.

First, United Nations forces must be prepared to confront the worst case scenario. The Blue Helmets must be trained, equipped and commanded for such an eventuality.

Secondly, these forces must have at their disposal all relevant information, as well as the capacity to analyse such information in terms of strategy and tactics, so they must be able to rely on an effective intelligence capability.

Thirdly, troop-contributing countries must be closely involved in the preparation of the mandates and in the management of operations. The Assembly will not be surprised to hear me plead for the recommendations formulated in the Brahimi report to receive wide support of all Member States. I hope that all actors concerned — the Member States, the Security Council and the Secretariat — prove their determination and their will to extend reforms to all levels and bodies of the Organization. I pledge the full support of the Belgian Government to Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette, who is responsible for their implementation.

I would also like to point out that, in our opinion, the conclusions of the Brahimi report cannot be dissociated from other discussions to be held during the fifty-fifth session, specifically those on the revision of the scale of assessments for peacekeeping budgets. In this regard as well, Member States will have to keep an open mind in order to set up an equitable system of financial burden sharing that is adapted to the current shape of the world.

Another sensitive question manifests itself clearly in the light of recent experiences, namely the proper role of the United Nations in relation to regional organizations, and indeed even in relation to the initiatives of neighbouring States in a conflict zone. Lessons to be learned from the Yugoslav crisis are not the same as those that can be drawn from recent crises, particularly those in Africa. The goal in this regard is not to deny the merits of the regional approach. On the contrary, Belgium supports the creation of regional rapid reaction forces in the service of peacekeeping, as was underlined one week ago by our Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, before this very body.

It has to do more with highlighting the fact that the merits of the regional approach clearly can never justify inaction on behalf of the international community or some sort of oratory diplomacy that passes off solving problems to regional bodies and organizations or to temporary coalitions. The Security Council, as the supreme authority in matters of peace and security, must be able to play its role, although it

should certainly be possible to refer some tasks to regional institutions most able to take action.

I would like to make one last observation regarding preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping. The arsenal at the disposal of the United Nations is not limited to sending troops. Other means are available and, moreover, have been used repeatedly during recent years. I am referring to sanctions, and in particular to economic sanctions. This type of coercive measure, if applied by the Security Council in accordance to the Charter, can indeed produce the results envisaged when their use is well targeted and limited in time or when they are inscribed in a realistic timeframe. But experience also shows that when they are applied indiscriminately or when they serve overtly ambitious political objectives, their effectiveness tends to decrease after a certain amount of time, and they may even produce results wholly opposite to the ones initially envisaged. It is increasingly rare for sanctions to be an useful instrument. Too often, they only penalize populations without reaching the targeted rulers, who often understand how to exploit the boomerang effect of such sanctions.

I would like to move now to a subject dear to my heart, Central Africa. During the past year, my country has expressed strongly its desire to be involved in, and to contribute to, the mobilization of the international community in support of the Lusaka peace process. It is essential that all Congolese parties engage resolutely and without preconditions in a dialogue, as they agreed to do in Lusaka. It is equally essential that our Organization and its Members who have the means to do so support the rapid deployment of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), even though some of the conditions and modalities of that operation may have to be reviewed in the light of the Brahimi report.

One thing is certain: without the presence of a peacekeeping force there will be no peace. Nor will there be peace, or even a permanent cessation of hostilities, without a dialogue between the Congolese parties. Both these questions are obviously linked. In order to overcome the current impasse it is essential to make progress where possible. It therefore seems to us that the problem should not be stated in terms of preconditions, order of events or priorities. In any event, the responsibility of the Security Council and the international community remain in place. Without a political leap by the parties to the conflict, and without the necessary material support of the international community, the peace process is doomed to fail.

In Burundi, where action by the countries of the region and the remarkable facilitation undertaken by former Presidents Nyerere and Mandela have started to yield promising yet still incomplete results, it is also time for our Organization and the principal donor countries to act to consolidate the gains achieved and to set the country once and for all on the path to peace and development. It is in this spirit that Belgium will participate actively in the meeting organized by the European Commission that is to be held in Brussels on 15 September to prepare for the donors' conference soon to be convened by France on the request of Nelson Mandela.

Regardless of how well-intentioned they may be, efforts in the cause of peace can sometimes be to little avail, given the greed and rivalries fuelled by the illegal exploitation of local resources. Resources attained in that way are financing wars, which themselves become a source of profit. The problem of the diamond trade in conflict areas is at the centre of this question. We know that war diamonds represent only a fraction of international trade, but these illegal revenues nevertheless contribute to destabilizing the situation, encourage the logic of war and spread corruption and anarchy. Belgium is active in the efforts to create a global system of verification. It is high time indeed to put in place a realistic and effective legal framework binding on everyone in order to regulate the trade in diamonds.

I would now like to speak about non-proliferation and disarmament. Last April, during the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Belgium intervened vigorously to express its concerns regarding a certain number of elements that could lead to the weakening or putting into question the very foundation of the non-proliferation regime negotiated in recent decades. We certainly welcome the conclusions of the Conference and the reflection that it triggered. That has led to a favourable climate for the implementation of the plan of action. That being said, numerous States still refuse to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, while others have not yet ratified the Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We have followed closely, and with some concern, the debate in the United States on anti-ballistic defence. Belgium is not opposed in principle

to the idea of anti-missile defence. We are only stating that the political perception, the analysis of the threat and the means to counter it vary greatly from region to region. There is no unique or universal response, but what is essential is to make sure that an anti-missile system, whatever it may be, should contribute to general stability and to the consolidation of mutual confidence. In other words, the decisions will have to be taken not only on the basis of a strategic and technical analysis, but also on a consensual basis that builds upon the overall political and strategic balance.

We welcome the decision by the American Administration to postpone its decision on the launching of a programme. Besides the question of the feasibility of such a programme, its unilateral nature would have a negative impact on our common disarmament objectives. We now hope that this decision will encourage negotiations for a START III agreement between the United States and Russia. Rapid progress on a new, substantial reduction of strategic nuclear arms could in turn lead to breaking the impasse in negotiations for a fissile materials cut-off treaty at the Disarmament Commission in Geneva.

Belgium also welcomes heartily the adherence to date by 138 States to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. Further efforts have to be made in order to implement it and mobilize the necessary funding to eliminate these especially inhumane weapons forever.

I have dwelled mainly on peace and international security. I would like to turn to the two other subjects that Belgium considers a priority in the programme of action of the Millennium Summit. Without these priorities, our efforts in the field of security would be fruitless. I am referring to universal respect for human rights and worldwide development.

The protection of human rights is a leading feature of my country's foreign policy. Our participation in the Commission on Human Rights will enable us to further enlarge our initiatives and our political action. We will be able to act more directly in the fields where we have a particular interest, such as the fight against racism and xenophobia, and the rights of the child. Belgium was actively involved in the negotiation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child aimed at sparing children as much as possible from the suffering and consequences of armed conflict. The signing of that Protocol on the occasion of the Millennium Summit, as well as our country's signature of the second Protocol, on sexual exploitation of children, are specific signs of our common will to reinforce the protection of the rights of the child.

I would like to reiterate my country's wish to see the death penalty permanently abolished all over the world. I also appeal to countries that are not in a position to do so at this time to adopt a moratorium as a transitional measure. We certainly cannot accept the death penalty still being implemented in cases of those who were minors at the time of the offence, pregnant women or the mentally ill.

We are following very closely the evolution of international law and jurisprudence aimed at condemning persons convicted of crimes against humanity. My country has been at the forefront of national legislation in this context and hopes that these measures can serve as a deterrent and an example for other States. We have just ratified the Statute of the International Criminal Court, and we are encouraging other States to do the same in support of this important commitment.

Let me say a few words on globalization and its problems. Globalization is the expression of an inevitable technological evolution. It makes little sense to condemn this evolution as a whole, for it is natural and has many positive effects, but we need to channel its dynamics towards real economic and social progress for the well-being of a larger number of people. But the globalization of the economy and trade cannot simply mean the renunciation of our political and institutional responsibilities. The risk is very real. We are already witnessing a form of abandonment of responsibilities in the case of Governments and Parliaments confronted by the gigantic challenges of globalization and the almost impossible task of dealing with them at the national level. In the absence of a really effective and recognized global authority, the dynamics of globalization could lead us into a political vacuum. There will be no new economic world order without a new political world order in which national democratic institutions, politically representative and accountable, can play a role. This is another challenge facing our Organization and its Member States. We will have to provide an answer in the new millennium.

The United Nations system is at the heart of the issue of globalization, whose effects are becoming

more and more evident. Questions have been raised; now it is time to find the answers. We are convinced that only the United Nations system, with all its spheres of activity, is in a position to harmonize global economic development with human development. Here, more than anywhere else, we realize that human beings, wherever they come from, share a high degree of common aspirations, as well as the same fears, the same needs and the same dreams. This belief has to guide us in all our actions, both here and at home.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa.

Ms. Dlamini-Zuma (South Africa): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the stewardship of this historic Assembly and also to congratulate your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, on his sterling guidance of the Assembly's work during the previous session.

The dawn of the new millennium offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on the successes and failures of the United Nations since its inception. It also provides us with an opportunity to dream about the future of humanity in the third millennium. The founders of the United Nations based the Charter on the assertion of human dignity, human rights and the equality of women and men and the aim of promoting better social standards. Indeed, billions of people today enjoy human rights and live in dignity, free from disease, ignorance and fear, enjoying the benefits of technology and scientific advances and able to take full advantage of the process of globalization. Equally, there are billions who are humiliated, degraded and stripped of their innate human dignity and worth by poverty, disease, ignorance, homelessness, hunger and wars.

This Assembly, following the very inspiring Millennium Summit, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the wise words of the leaders of the world and on the Declaration they adopted. Global consensus has at last emerged and confirms that we live in one world and belong to the same human race; therefore, while each Government has the responsibility to take care of its citizens, we all have to work together for the good of humanity as a whole. This means that we have to create a people-centred world that is more caring, with a strong sense of solidarity, where we are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers, if I may borrow those words from the Bible.

There is also universal consensus now that while billions of people are being degraded and dehumanized by poverty, disease and hunger, there are indeed enough resources in the world to feed, educate and restore the dignity of all human beings and make this world a better place for all. It is therefore clear that the eradication of hunger and poverty should be the priority of all priorities and should be our collective responsibility.

There is also agreement that we have a collective responsibility in dealing with infectious diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. There is a need to mobilize material and human resources, provide better infrastructure, provide health education and ensure access to affordable medicine.

There is also consensus that Africa poses the biggest development challenge. The success or failure of the United Nations and of humankind as a whole in this century will be determined by their success in dealing with the African development challenge.

We would like to urge the United Nations, in partnership with the Organization of African Unity and regional organizations, to accelerate the work towards peace and stability in many of the countries of our continent, such as Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Burundi, so that these countries may take their rightful place in the continent, be seized with the needs of their people, promote development, produce and export goods and not be areas of perpetual suffering and war that result in their being the net exporters of refugees. We welcome the Brahimi report and are studying it, as it contains very serious suggestions about the future operations of the United Nations.

The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, is humanity's principal agent for collective security and it needs urgent reform so as to be able to live up to this solemn responsibility. The world has changed dramatically and continues to do so. It is imperative that the composition and role of the Security Council reflect that change and not remain obsolete. The Bretton Woods institutions are equally in need of urgent reform in order to discharge their mandate and respond to the new development

challenge. The World Trade Organization has to adapt its international trade rules so that they are equitable and fair and take account of global development challenges.

It is a source of great concern to the developing countries that, increasingly, decisions are taken outside the United Nations and other global structures by developed and rich countries when these decisions have a great impact on the poorer countries and directly affect the lives of billions of poor people. That is why a partnership between poor and rich countries and dialogue between North and South are so critical.

Nuclear weapons still constitute a threat to our planet. We have to pursue the path of universal disarmament and the destruction of all weapons of mass destruction.

The need to protect the environment has assumed greater importance and we can succeed only if we work together.

The self-determination of the people of East Timor, Western Sahara and Palestine must be a concern to all of us. To this end, we urge the United Nations to do all it can to expedite the processes in East Timor and Western Sahara. We commend the peace efforts in the Middle East and the role of the United States. We would like to pledge our support to the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships as they try to find creative solutions to their problems. They must be urged to take advantage of this unique historic moment, as it seems that a real possibility exists for a solution.

The equality of women and men still remains a subject of great concern. All we need to do is look around this Hall to realize how far we are from realizing the vision of the founding Members of the United Nations. Secondly, the feminization of poverty is a big problem. The marginalization of women, both in their countries and in the multilateral forums, means that our countries and organizations, including the United Nations, are functioning at half-capacity and are deprived of the unique qualities, energies and creativity that women would bring. In this context, I cannot forget the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma. She deserves active support from this gathering and the world.

The United Nations was founded in part to make sure that the monsters of fascism and racism should not rear their ugly heads again. Unfortunately, all over the world racism and xenophobia are on the increase. Some countries and regions are responding by developing a new fortress mentality, which does not help the situation. This should flash red warning lights to all of us and activate our utmost vigilance against the scourges of racism and xenophobia.

It is only when we turn our backs on racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination that we can succeed in building a caring world where we feel diminished by the suffering and hunger of other human beings. It was for this reason that we felt a sense of obligation and agreed to host the world racism Conference next year. Of course, our country and people experienced the most systematic, most brutal and most inhumane form of racism, which the United Nations declared a crime against humanity. We are happy to take our place in the fight against racism in our country and in the world. It is our fervent hope that the Conference will come up with a programme of action against racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

In conclusion, let us all put our collective will, courage and intellectual creativity together in shaping the dream of a better world; a world of solidarity; a world where no child should starve or die of preventable and curable diseases; a world where no child will be deprived of schooling; a world where children will not be sent to war; a world where no child can be a slave or be used as an object for trafficking; a world where children grow up as children and play with toys and do not have to be breadwinners or worry about where their next meal is going to come from; a world where women will enjoy all rights and where the eradication of poverty and war is our collective responsibility.

The dream for the new millennium is indeed realisable. If we act with courage and determination, we can turn the hopes of billions across the world into reality.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yohei Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Kono (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; English text furnished by the delegation*): First, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, a former Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, on your assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

I would also like to pay my respects to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Namibia, for all his efforts during his tenure as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

It is also my great pleasure to welcome the admission of Tuvalu as a new Member of the United Nations.

Before proceeding to my main topic, I would like to mention two important developments that took place in the international community in recent months. Concerning the situation on the Korean peninsula, the recent inter-Korean summit was indeed epoch-making and I strongly hope that this positive development will continue, advance in the future and lead to peace and stability in North-East Asia. With regard to the Middle East peace process, Japan is very much encouraged by the commitment of both parties to continuing their negotiations and, together with the international community, will strongly support the efforts of the parties to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

In order to ensure that the twenty-first century is truly a century of peace, it is of the greatest importance that the international community make united efforts to address the issues of disarmament and non-proliferation.

In 1945, Hiroshima and Nagasaki became the first two cities in human history to suffer indescribable nuclear devastation. That experience is the starting point of Japan's actions aimed at the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons. With succeeding generations in this half-century, the extremely shocking experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki might very well be pushed to the edge of our memory. In such circumstances, new signs of proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles are arousing our concern. I believe, however, that engraving the tragic experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in our minds is the first step toward the creation of a world free from the nuclear threat, which is one of the biggest challenges facing the United Nations. In light of such experiences, Japan has maintained the three non-nuclear principles as its fundamental national policy and has focused particular attention on nuclear issues. It will continue to stress the importance of this issue.

Since the Second World War, we have adopted as the basic ideas of our nation: democracy, commitment to peace and respect for fundamental human rights, which are enshrined in the Japanese Constitution. Moreover, under its basic policy of not becoming a military power, Japan has mobilized all its available resources for the prosperity of its people and achieved economic development. It hopes to utilize that experience and make a further contribution to the economic development and enhancement of the welfare of developing countries.

Throughout my political career, I have been deeply committed to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues. A senior politician for whom I have great respect once told me with great fervour:

> "I hope that somebody among the peoples of the world will take the lead in advocating peace, and that all others will cooperate for that cause, so that the earth will avoid a crisis. I believe that Japan must play the role of that somebody."

These words have become my political credo, as well as the resolve of many Japanese people. When I was Foreign Minister in 1994, Japan submitted to the General Assembly for the first time a resolution entitled "Nuclear disarmament with a view to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons" (49/75 H), which gained the support of an overwhelming majority of Member States. Japan's support of the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1995 is attributed to the strong will of the Japanese people. I highly appreciate the final document adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference this spring, since it contains practical steps to be taken in the future in the fields of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including an unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear arsenals. I also appreciate the postponement by the United States Government of its decision to deploy a national missile defence, as a result of prudent consideration with an emphasis on further dialogue on this important issue. Japan hopes that this announcement will inspire a further deepening of the discussion on issues surrounding national missile defence. I hope other countries respond to this move by taking actions to avoid a vicious circle of an arms race and to create a beneficent circle toward nuclear disarmament. The international community must continue its efforts aimed at non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and demand that the nuclear weapon States further reduce their nuclear arsenals. This will definitely require a further reduction

by the United States and Russia in their nuclear weapons through the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START), as well as efforts by other nuclear weapon States, unilaterally or through their negotiations, to reduce their nuclear arsenals. I also believe that we must seriously consider what kind of practical paths we should take to realize a world free from the fear of nuclear weapons. A world free of nuclear weapons is not a dream; it is within our reach.

Mr. José Roberto Andino Salazar (El Salvador), Vice-President, took the Chair.

To that end Japan will submit to this session of the General Assembly a draft resolution on the elimination of nuclear weapons, which sets forth a path towards the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons, while ensuring the non-proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction. It does so through measures such as the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty, as well as the promotion of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty III negotiations, and through further, deeper reductions at a later stage in nuclear arsenals, leading in the final stage to total elimination. Japan expects that this resolution will gain wide support from the international community.

Further, I would like to point out the importance of concluding negotiations on the protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) by the year 2001, and strengthening efforts to cope with missile proliferation.

Now I would like to discuss international efforts for conflict prevention. For the effective prevention of conflicts, it is important to employ various policy measures in a comprehensive and effective manner. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan advocates, it is incumbent upon the international community to nurture a "culture of prevention". The G-8 Miyazaki Initiatives for Conflict Prevention, which was drawn up at the G-8 Foreign Ministers meeting in Miyazaki, over which I presided, embodies this idea of a "culture of prevention".

On the issue of small arms and light weapons, in which Japan has been actively engaged, the G-8 countries made clear for the first time that they will not authorize the export of small arms if there is a clear risk that these might be used for repression or aggression against another country. I hope this achievement will lead to the success of next summer's United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Moreover, at Japan's initiative, a fund relating to small arms was established at the United Nations this spring. The purpose of this fund is to extend assistance for the collection of small arms and the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian society.

Under the G-8 Miyazaki Initiatives for Conflict Prevention, we will actively work to strengthen such development assistance that contributes to preventing the outbreak or recurrence of conflicts. For this purpose, Japan will promote its collaboration with non-governmental organizations by, for example, providing assistance for their emergency humanitarian activities and dispatching joint study missions for emergency rehabilitation.

In recent years, United Nations peacekeeping operations have had to be deployed more rapidly. Moreover, as the examples of Kosovo and East Timor have shown, peacekeeping operations are now required to carry out diverse mandates that include humanitarian assistance, emergency rehabilitation and even civil administration. To make possible the rapid and effective deployment of such peacekeeping operations, strengthening the Secretariat's functions as well as more, quick-response cooperation on the part of the international community are all the more important. Japan welcomes the report and recommendations by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations established at the initiative of the Secretary-General.

The continued high toll in human life among United Nations personnel taking part in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian missions is a matter of profound concern. Recently there was an unforgivable militia attack on the local office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in West Timor. Measures must be taken to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel through close cooperation between the United Nations, the country concerned, and its neighbouring countries.

With regard to United Nations peace operations, Japan intends to continue to do its best, including personnel and financial contributions to peacekeeping operations and assistance for emergency rehabilitation, democratization and the establishment of legal

frameworks, as well as assistance to international organizations.

Poverty reduction is a high-priority issue for the leader of every country. Japan, consistently aware of the importance of this issue, has been providing more aid than any country in the world for nine consecutive years, since 1991. Henceforth, considering what would be most effective for the development of developing countries, Japan will continue to make active efforts on development issues in cooperation with those countries. It accordingly intends to contribute towards the success of the high-level international and intergovernmental event on financing for development expected to be held in 2001 under the aegis of the United Nations and others.

Moreover, it is extremely valuable that developing countries that have achieved certain levels of development put their own experience and know-how to use in providing assistance to other developing countries. Japan, in collaboration with the United Nations and other organizations, will strengthen its endeavours for South-South cooperation.

Concerning Africa, where poverty is an especially serious issue, Japan twice hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) — in 1993 and 1998. It intends to continue to actively cooperate for African development through the TICAD process. Bearing in mind the possibility of also hosting a third such conference, Japan is considering holding a ministerial-level meeting before the end of fiscal year 2001, and would like to ask for the cooperation of the countries and organizations concerned.

In April Japan hosted the second Japan-South Pacific Forum summit meeting, at which it, together with small island States burdened with geographically disadvantageous conditions, put forward a common vision and a course for mid- and long-term cooperation. Moreover, this fall Japan will hold the first ministerial-level conference with the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). As for the issue of sustainable development in landlocked States, it is Japan's policy to extend active cooperation for the improvement and development of their transportation infrastructure, and other matters.

Regarding the debt problem of the heavily indebted poor countries, Japan has decided to contribute up to a total of $200 million to the Trust Fund of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative of the World Bank. It will continue to make its utmost efforts for the speedy and effective implementation of the enhanced HIPC Initiative, for example, by extending technical assistance to heavily indebted poor countries as they prepare their poverty-reduction strategies.

As we enter the twenty-first century we are faced with various issues, such as conflicts, poverty, refugees, human rights violations, health, crime, terrorism and environmental degradation. Also we need to build communities in which the rights of women, children and various vulnerable members of society are protected, in which they can demonstrate their talents, and in which all people can live together. In addressing such issues, it is increasingly important from the viewpoint of securing the existence, life and dignity of each individual to strengthen efforts that place human beings at the centre. This is the concept of human security.

I would like first of all to touch upon the issue of infectious diseases, which are not only a threat to the life of the individual, but also a serious obstacle to development and nation-building. Japan will extend assistance to the efforts of developing countries to combat infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. It will also actively support the activities of non-governmental organizations in developing countries working in this area.

Moreover, Japan believes that the development of a United Nations-centred legal framework for combating transnational organized crime and terrorism is urgently required.

Efforts to address global environmental issues are becoming increasingly important from the viewpoint of human security as well. Attaching greater importance to development assistance that takes the environment into consideration, Japan has allocated approximately 40 per cent of its official development assistance to environmental cooperation. The primary tasks at this moment on the environmental agenda are the success of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the entry into force no later than 2002 of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming issues.

Concerning the Rio+10 event to be held in 2002, Japan believes that an agenda looking to the future should be set, taking into account the debates on the

effective implementation of many international environmental conventions, as well as globalization and the technological innovations that have occurred since the Earth Summit in 1992. Mapping out strategies to implement more effectively the large number of environmental conventions concluded in recent years will also be important. Japan strongly supports holding the Rio+10 conference in Asia and welcomes Indonesia's candidacy to host the conference.

Further endeavours must be made to solve the problems confronting women, children and various vulnerable members of society. Japan highly appreciates efforts made in this regard by the United Nations, including its convening in June of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". Furthermore, Japan will host the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, and will advance its efforts for the protection of the rights of the child.

I have touched upon only a limited part of the efforts focusing upon human security. Japan has contributed more than 9 billion yen — well over $80 million — to the human security fund that was established at the United Nations last year, and in the near future intends to make a further contribution of approximately 10 billion yen — or roughly $100 million — to this fund. The fund has borne fruit in assisting efforts particularly in such areas as post-conflict emergency assistance and reconstruction, health and medical care, and basic education. To further develop and deepen the concept of human security and to study ways to strengthen efforts in this context, Japan intends to establish an international committee on human security, with the participation of leaders of opinion.

As I have stated, issues requiring action by the international community are becoming ever more diverse and complex. We must urgently strengthen the United Nations system to enable it to deal with these issues.

First of all, this requires, as a matter of urgency, that the Security Council be re-created as a body that reflects the tremendous changes in the international community. At the Millennium Summit held last week the representatives of approximately a hundred Member States referred to this issue in their speeches within the limited time. The Millennium Declaration, expressing the determination to intensify our efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council, reflects the overall views of the heads of State and Government of Member States. In particular, there is a need for reform that reflects the views of developing countries, which are playing an ever more important role in the international community, and that fosters the participation of those countries with the capability to contribute to the solution of various issues facing the developing countries.

I believe that both the representativeness and effectiveness of the Security Council can be enhanced through an expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership, and the inclusion of both developing and developed countries in the new permanent membership. Although we have already spent seven years discussing reform, during which relevant aspects of the issue have been exhaustively explored, we have yet to see the reform materialize. Even during the discussions, conflicts have broken out, and poverty is worsening in various parts of the world. I would like to emphasize that the time has come to seek a convergence of views among Member States on the concrete form of Security Council reform.

Today the maintenance of international peace and security requires action, not only in political and security areas, but also in economic, social and various other areas.

When the reform of the Security Council is realized, Japan would like to assume a greater responsibility as a permanent member of the Council, mobilizing its capabilities and its experiences in various areas, such as disarmament and non-proliferation, development and human security, and based upon the ideas which I have discussed today.

A prerequisite for the strengthening of United Nations functions is securing a sound financial base. In addition to streamlining as well as improving the efficiency and transparency of United Nations finances, achieving a balance in financial burden-sharing is especially important. Today's financial burden sharing cannot be considered to reflect the economic strength of respective countries or their positions and responsibilities within the United Nations. Japan would like to appeal for its urgent revision. I strongly hope that an agreement can be reached on a more equitable scale of assessments for the regular budget at this session, as an important step towards the establishment

of a more stable financial base. Moreover, I hope that the substantive discussions for peacekeeping operations budgets, which are rapidly increasing, will also be conducted during this session and that a more equitable scale of assessments for these budgets can be agreed.

As we welcome the twenty-first century, while respecting diversity, we must transcend the differences that arise out of our sense of belonging to an ethnic, religious or cultural group. The foundation for these endeavours is provided by international relationships based on universal values common to all humankind, such as democracy, human rights and freedom. The United Nations must play a central role in our efforts to construct such international relationships.

In order to achieve peace, we must engage in dialogue with each other in a spirit of tolerance, and join hands in tackling various challenges. At the United Nations this year is designated the "International Year for the Culture of Peace", and next year, 2001, is designated the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". These designations and the implementation of related substantive activities reflect a growing recognition of this idea.

As globalization progresses and economy-oriented rationalism prevails, we should pay special attention to the task of raising awareness of cultural diversity, nurturing the special character of respective countries and regions, and preserving historical and cultural heritage. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should play a central role in this regard. Every country should recognize the role of UNESCO, and join together in extending assistance to strengthen its activities.

I believe that this Millennium Assembly, which began with the Millennium Summit, should be an epochal starting point of meaningful progress in the twenty-first century, both in consolidating our efforts to tackle various challenges and in strengthening United Nations functions through Security Council and financial reform. Towards that end, I should like to conclude by underscoring once again the growing importance of cooperation among all Member States.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Moussa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great pleasure for me to convey through you, Sir, to the President of the General Assembly our sincere congratulations upon his election. I am confident that he will lead the work of this Millennium Assembly most ably.

I should also like to express our sincere appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, for his exceptional leadership of the fifty-fourth session.

May I also express our high esteem for the Secretary-General for his most efficient preparation for both the Millennium Summit and Assembly. We appreciate his efforts to maintain and promote the role of the Organization and to strengthen its effectiveness and credibility.

The convening of the Millennium Summit and Assembly is an important milestone in the international system and the future of the United Nations. The two occasions constitute a unique forum to review the state of the world and its developments and to take stock of the performance of the Organization so as to enable it to occupy its central place in the international system and hence lead the movement of change on the basis of a general consensus and a meeting of all minds.

The goal of the establishment of a stable and effective system of collective security through dialogue and cooperation in the context of international democracy has been one of the most important objectives of the United Nations and those of the international community. It is thus necessary to allow the United Nations to achieve its objectives by adapting its work to the current international variables that must take the United Nations seriously. This might very well be the thrust of the Secretary-General's report to the Millennium Assembly.

In our opinion, the first step down this road is to agree on a broad modern definition of collective security in the coming decades. Security in its most simple and realistic definition is based on three basic and organically linked rights, namely, the right to safety and stability and avoidance of the scourges of war, mass destruction and armed conflicts, the right to development and to a decent life free from poverty, destitution and want and the right to live in a healthy environment free from pollution, disease and negative social phenomena. A cursory glance at the state of those three rights would reveal that during the last decade of international transformations they have become exposed to new threats, while existing ones

have been exacerbated in a manner threatening grave repercussions.

After the end of the cold war and the end of tensions between the two super-Powers, international peace became exposed to a new kind of threat, the threat resulting from the disintegration of some States, the collapse of their national structures and the victimization of their people due to internal strife and negative foreign intervention.

Globalization, world market, the information and communications revolution and the emergence of new kinds of economic activities all hold the promise of unlimited progress, yet they carry with them the dangers of widening the development gap between the developed and developing world.

As for a healthy environment, whole continents are suffering from epidemics, environmental degradation, backwardness and the spread of ethnic wars as well as the increased tragedies of refugees.

Africa is the region most affected by that horrible triangle — armed civil conflicts, poverty and economic backwardness, degraded environment, natural disasters, deadly diseases and epidemics. There is a belt of tension encircling the continent and economic difficulties and problems continue. Africa has thus reached an untenable situation that requires immediate and firm attention in order to help it extricate itself from that quagmire.

I must reiterate in this regard that the African States, through the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other groupings, are discharging their responsibilities as best they can. They are taking necessary measures and steps to place themselves on the right path towards a better future. Special mention should be made here of the OAU Mechanism for conflict resolution, the efforts to strengthen peacekeeping capabilities through subregional groupings and the establishment of common markets and economic groupings, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Our continent is moving towards a form of unity on the basis of the resolutions of the recent Lomé summit, which will be followed up at the upcoming Sirte summit.

An agreement was recently concluded in Arusha on the settlement of the Burundi conflict. A new President of Somalia, Mr. Abdi Kassim Salad Hassan, was elected after the constructive efforts of the Government of sisterly Djibouti. There are efforts under way in the Great Lakes region. All these examples prove Africa's ability to deal on its own with some of its problems. Yet it cannot be left alone without the support of the international community, particularly in the field of peacekeeping and peace-making. The United Nations must play its full role in that field.

Meeting the new challenges faced by the international community and achieving the goal of establishing an effective system of collective security for future generations require, as I mentioned earlier, improving the United Nations performance and adapting it to the demands of these goals. In his message to the Millennium Summit last week, President Mubarak stressed the need to pay special attention to the maintenance of international peace and to support efforts for development, poverty elimination and narrowing the widening gap between the rich and the poor in our world.

Allow me to address these priorities and to stress their linkage to a number of important subjects and necessary steps. First, there is an urgent need to strengthen and reform the United Nations in general. There is a similar need to reform and restructure the Security Council and to enhance its credibility. We are determined to continue our contribution to the current dialogue on a comprehensive and balanced package deal on the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. This would enable the Council to be more equitably representative. It would also reflect the overwhelming majority of the developing countries, members of the Organization.

We are fully committed to the positions of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in this regard. We reiterate the need for expansion of the Council to be accompanied by reform of its working methods and a revision of the use of the veto power, with a view to rationalizing it.

I wish to stress here what I mentioned earlier — that Egypt has a long history of regional and international contributions. It plays a significant role on the African, Arab and Islamic levels, as well as in the Middle East and among the developing countries

and emerging economies. In addition, Egypt has made many contributions to support United Nations activities and achieve its objectives. It has also contributed to the Organization's peacekeeping operations. All this makes Egypt eminently eligible and qualified to shoulder the responsibilities of permanent membership in an expanded Security Council, within the framework suggested by the African heads of State and Government since 1997.

Second, there is an equally urgent need to restore the role of the General Assembly in the maintenance of peace, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, especially when the Security Council fails to discharge its primary responsibility in this regard. This would ensure that any collective actions or measures enjoyed the international legitimacy represented by the Organization. There is a need to further develop United Nations peacekeeping operations and provide them with a rapid deployment capability. There is also a need for concerted efforts to increase the capacity of States, particularly African States, to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, or those of regional and subregional organizations which are mandated and financed by the United Nations. Egypt will address these important issues when the General Assembly considers the Brahimi report (A/55/305).

These considerations must be kept in mind when we address how to develop the conceptual and practical framework of peacemaking and peacekeeping. New ideas, such as humanitarian intervention and the preventive deployment of forces, have, since the last session, begun to gain currency. We have called, and continue to call, for discussion of those ideas with the highest degree of frankness and transparency. Those ideas impinge on the concept of sovereignty. Some tend to belittle the value and importance of sovereignty when the matter pertains to the sovereignty of others. Those very same States tend also to consider it sacrosanct and inviolable when the matter pertains to their own sovereignty.

Third, the sanctions regime, as one of the component parts of the measures taken within the current system of collective security, needs a thorough review. Sanctions cannot last indefinitely. They must not cause human suffering to tens of millions of people or result in massive and destructive harm to the economic infrastructures or social fabric of States. Sanctions must not lead to the creation of angry generations who will continue to be embittered by their suffering, even after these actions are lifted.

Fourth, there is a need to recognize the importance of continued, serious consideration of the question of disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, which is the most destructive and poses the greatest threats. The priority of nuclear disarmament must not be overshadowed by the increased attention paid to small arms, light weapons and anti-personnel landmines. This is not to say that we do not recognize the importance of these subjects or the need to deal with them comprehensively and appropriately. In this regard, we reaffirm Egypt's initiatives for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. We welcome the results of the sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the field of nuclear disarmament in general. We welcome in particular the Conference's recognition of the specificity of the situation in the Middle East and its reaffirmation of the continued validity and importance of implementing the resolutions on the Middle East adopted by the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995.

Fifth, with the accelerated pace of globalization and trade liberalization, the gap between the rich and poor countries is widening in a manner that threatens grave dangers. The comparison between patterns of production and consumption and standards of living in the developing and developed worlds is both stark and shocking. Narrowing this gap and correcting this imbalance in the international structure is not merely a moral obligation, but is vital. An international partnership must be established to achieve this objective.

The call for social justice within States must be accompanied by a similar call for justice in sharing the benefits of progress, globalization, the information technology and communications revolution and trade liberalization among members of the international family in the North and the South alike. We truly need to give globalization a human face and an equilibrium that will enable it to contribute to bridging that gap.

United Nations literature is replete with studies on the problems of and obstacles to development and the elimination of poverty. This, however, is no longer sufficient. In several international conferences we have adopted plans and programmes of action containing

clear commitments to mobilize the financial resources necessary to implement them. Yet implementation has not been at the level of the commitments contained in those documents.

A few months ago we reviewed progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the international conferences on population, women and social development. But what were the results of these reviews? What are the ways needed to face the obstacles that have impeded progress and made the implementation of the recommendations of those conferences fall below our expectations?

We have adopted the objective of halving poverty in the world by 2015. What is the course charted for achieving this objective and what are the commitments made to mobilize the financial resources necessary for its achievement? What about the numerous programmes and initiatives for African development? Have their achievements been commensurate with the magnitude of the problems facing the continent? Is it not time for a clear commitment, going beyond the current initiatives, to lift the burden of foreign indebtedness that is crushing Africa? We need a genuine partnership between the North and the South. We need real and effective support by the donors and the international financial institutions to implement development efforts and attempts to eliminate poverty, not only as a moral value taking the form of freedom from want, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (A/54/2000), but also as a vital objective connected to the establishment of peace and stability.

Sixth, in the same vein, an attempt to place responsibility for achieving development and eliminating poverty solely or even primarily on the shoulders of developing countries is both dangerous and short-sighted, because it would undermine the concept of international cooperation, which is one of the cornerstones of the world system, and ignore the repercussions of the widening gap between the rich and the poor in our world. That gap is now 16 times as large as it was in the 1960s.

An attempt is also being made to link international cooperation and the North's support for the South with concepts and values that in themselves we support but whose new conditionality we reject. I am referring here to democracy, good governance and human rights. Questions of democratic transformation, improved governance and administration, increased transparency and accountability, and promoting respect for human rights cannot be dealt with in isolation from the questions of development, poverty and subsistence, for they too are vitally important subjects. Should not the call for democracy within States be matched by a similar call for democracy among States and international organizations? Should not the call for the rule of law be accompanied by a similar call for respect for international law, the sovereignty of States and the rights of peoples? Can good governance and administration be achieved in the absence of a parallel effort for the development of human resources and the capacity-building? Is it sufficient just to pay attention to the civil and political rights of people while ignoring their economic, social and cultural rights, foremost among which is the inalienable right to development?

Seventh, the success of the development efforts of the peoples of the world at this stage depends on their efficient use of the tools of the new age, particularly information technology. The technological revolution has led to a widening of the gap between those who have those tools and those who do not. Nevertheless, information and knowledge technologies are of such a nature as to enable them to contribute to narrowing the gaps between the countries of the world.

The attention Egypt pays to these global questions does not take away from the attention it gives to regional issues that are extremely sensitive. Among those questions, I would like to concentrate on the issues of peace in the Middle East and the situation in the Sudan, which are of the utmost importance to Egypt and, without a doubt, to many in the Arab world, Africa and the international community at large.

The Arab-Israeli conflict entails vital issues related to the lives of peoples and to the future of nations. Those include recognition of legitimate rights, sovereignty over national soil, the inalienable right to self-determination, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the right of all States to live peacefully within secure borders. All these issues are directly linked to international and regional peace and security.

The logic that must govern the peace process in the Middle East should not stem from the assumption that one is dealing with a permanent foe or opponent. It must aim instead at turning past animosity into good-neighbourliness and normal relations among the peoples and the States of the region. What is at stake is

the security of the region and the security and prosperity of future generations, and not short-term political considerations. We face a clear choice between either settling the issue in terms of real estate — in which one party demands metres, miles or tens of miles — thereby keeping alive the seeds of tension and conflict, or by seeking through clear political will to establish a just and lasting peace by which the rights of all parties are secured and their obligations are well defined through necessary international guarantees. The latter option must be based on international law, something that applies to the Israeli/Palestinian track and to the Syrian/Israeli track alike.

There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of States, communities and individuals support the achievement of a just solution that does not favour one party at the expense of the other. Most people would opt for peace and justice and would prefer to look ahead to the future in a positive way. The overwhelming majority of the Palestinian and Israeli people also want peace, a peace that is clear and clean and not partial, distorted or absent — something that, at the end of the day, would be more of a headache than a concrete peace. In that regard, I would like to say that President Arafat and the Palestinian people face one of two choices: either no solution or a bad solution. This is a policy that will never garner support or appreciation or ever lead to a viable solution.

As to the so-called flexibility, which has been at the forefront of commentary lately, it should mean only flexibility within the realm of international law and not outside it. If we are talking about flexibility on Jerusalem, that cannot in any way mean accepting Israeli sovereignty over Al-Haram al-Sharif. It could instead mean arrangements for the new Palestinian State that would give it sovereignty over all its territories while respecting the holy sites and guaranteeing their protection and free access to them. That would assume that, as a full-fledged member of the international community, the sovereign Palestinian State would be in charge.

The peace process is but a few miles away from the finish line. We hope it will not take many long years for Syria and Palestine to travel those few miles. We also hope that the sponsors of the peace process will be wise and able enough to propose honest solutions to the parties in order to enable the honest broker to lead the negotiations to a certain conclusion. At this juncture, I would like to salute President Clinton's enthusiasm and tireless efforts in steering the peace process during an eleventh-hour attempt to find a lasting solution during his Administration.

In order to achieve that objective it is essential to uphold one guiding principle that cannot be circumvented, namely, full withdrawal from all Syrian and Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in return for Israel's right to be integrated into the Middle East as a partner with equal rights to security, peace and cooperation. That is the essence of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and of the principle of land for peace. Lasting peace and security can be established only on that basis. If Arab territories, or any part of those territories, remain under occupation or if any question is settled in a manner inconsistent with the principles of fairness and justice, it would create a time bomb that could explode at any time. The desired peace and security cannot be fully realized without the establishment of a full-fledged, independent Palestinian State.

The stability of peace and security in the Middle East is tied to the need for serious consideration of the question of armaments in the Middle East. Permanently defusing tensions calls for dealing with the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles. This will also contribute directly to the maintenance of international peace and security. Peace and stability in the Middle East will not be complete or lasting without the establishment of a comprehensive regional security system that ensures control over the quantity and quality of armaments in the region and establishes a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with President Mubarak's initiative, which enjoys global understanding and support.

The Sudan is a State of unique character in regional relations. It is at once a major component of the Arab world and an integral part of the African community. Its stability is also vital for the security and stability of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the Nile basin. The importance Egypt attaches to this brotherly country therefore stems not only from the fact that it is Egypt's strategic twin, but because it is a central factor to the security of a vast and vitally important region.

Many efforts have been made, and many initiatives have been presented, to achieve peace in the

Sudan, most of which were made in good faith. However, they all dealt with the situation from a single perspective, that of the southern Sudan against the north.

Consequently, Egypt and Libya saw the need to complement those efforts with a comprehensive programme aimed at achieving broad national reconciliation encompassing all the factions and all the parties. The objective is to create a new Sudan, where stability and harmony prevail within a basic framework of unity and territorial integrity, equality among its citizens, and consensual self-determination by all its citizens and component parts. This will bring comfort and reassurance to the Sudanese people and to all its neighbours.

The Egyptian-Libyan initiative has gone a long way towards bringing the parties closer. The coordination of this initiative with that of the Inter-Government Authority on Development (IGAD) is possible. Efforts will continue to ensure the convening of a conference on national reconciliation to achieve peace in that important country.

The achievement of peace in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and in the continents of Asia and Africa as a whole is a necessary condition for world stability. The situation in Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Caucasus, Sri Lanka, the continued tragedy of Iraq, and the conflicts in Africa and their attendant social and economic problems all give rise to serious concerns about the new world order — about its credibility and effectiveness. We must act quickly in order to resolve these problems in a context of international legitimacy and within the framework of the United Nations.

Finally, amid all that, the United Nations stands as an expression of the will of the international community. The purposes and principles of its Charter are a guiding beacon. Let this Millennium Summit and Assembly be a new turning point that will put us on the right path towards a world of greater security, justice and stability, a world that builds upon the achievements of the twentieth century and closes the chapter on its grave errors.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien (Viet Nam): I would like to convey our warm congratulations to Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election to the presidency of this fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I wish also to extend our greetings to Tuvalu as a new Member of the United Nations.

This year's session of the General Assembly is of special significance, as it is taking place right after the Millennium Summit. The Summit marked an important milestone for the United Nations in the discharge of the lofty responsibilities of the Organization and its Member States towards the future of humankind. The Millennium Declaration adopted by the Summit points out humanity's most pressing issues and the Organization's primary priorities and directions at the beginning of this new era. Thus the Millennium Declaration can be considered a new charter and platform of action of the United Nations.

The question now confronting the international community is how to translate the Millennium Declaration into reality. This session of the General Assembly must mark the beginning of a new awareness and determination, to be demonstrated by concrete results. Only by so doing can we further consolidate the confidence of the world's people in the work of the United Nations, the largest Organization on our planet.

The realization of the Millennium Declaration will be a long process, but not a simple one. It will require the strong determination and efforts of each country, the international community and the United Nations, especially since globalization is having negative effects, leading to the uneven distribution of opportunities and benefits at the expense of developing countries.

Poverty eradication and development must be accorded primary priority and supported so that we can achieve the targets set by the Millennium Summit, including the target to halve, by the year 2015, the current proportion of the world's poor people, endeavouring to make the right to development a reality for everyone. Among human rights, the right to development is of paramount importance. With poverty and without development, there can be no peace and stability, let alone human rights. On the other hand, the consolidation of international peace and security will help to create a stable, enabling environment for development and poverty eradication, in each country and each region, as well as throughout the world.

To achieve development and poverty eradication, the first decisive requirement is for countries to

enhance their efforts and adopt suitable policies and programmes aimed at making the fullest use of their resources and potential, while at the same time fully mobilizing and effectively utilizing resources from outside. The United Nations, for its part, should strengthen its capacity and direct the necessary resources necessary to support the poverty-eradication efforts of the Member States.

Another extremely important point is that the developed and industrialized countries, as well as economic centres, must further enhance their assistance to developing countries in their endeavour to achieve development and poverty eradication. That should include debt-relief and write-off measures and an increase in official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product, to which they have committed themselves.

The objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration have long been considered by Viet Nam as its primary policy priorities. For example, through our own determined efforts and with the assistance of the United Nations and other countries, we have reduced the poverty rate, according to Viet Nam's criteria, to 11 per cent in 2000 from 30 per cent in 1992. We hope that this support and assistance will be further enhanced to facilitate Viet Nam's consolidation of the achievements recorded.

In the final analysis, all of these issues are aimed at serving the human being. Human resources and cultural development are two closely related aspects within the overall programme of development and poverty eradication. They are therefore both the goal and the driving force of development. This is the lesson that we can draw from the experience of many decades. It needs to be given appropriate and close attention in the policies of all countries.

Those objectives have been reflected also in Vision 2020 of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in the Hanoi Programme of Action. They include the expansion of cooperation in South-East Asia and in East Asia and the building of development triangles and quadrangles crossing poor regions. Concrete examples include the promising initiatives of the East-West corridor for development and the proclamation of the first decade of the twenty-first century as the Decade of Greater Mekong Subregion Development Cooperation, a proclamation which is supported by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Those programmes are fully compatible with the directives contained in the Millennium Declaration, and they should therefore be properly supported by the United Nations and by the international community. Viet Nam and ASEAN will also contribute to further advances along this path.

In many regions of the world, protracted conflicts continue, causing instability and hindering the efforts of those regions and the countries in them to eradicate poverty eradication and attain development. Viet Nam and ASEAN support the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, without interference or imposition, so as to improve and consolidate regional peace, and not to further complicate the situation and adversely affect the confidence of the peoples of the countries concerned in the endeavours of the international community. Our common responsibility is therefore to guarantee that there will no repetition of interference of the kind that occurred recently in violation of the United Nations Charter and to put an end to the embargoes that have imposed untold sufferings on the peoples of Cuba and Iraq.

Greater efforts should be made to further enhance disarmament, especially disarmament relating to nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and to curb the growing danger of a new arms race, including attempts to deploy new missile systems.

In South-East Asia and in East Asia, the ASEAN countries have been leading the effort to build a region of amity, cooperation and prosperity, free from nuclear weapons; to resolve outstanding issues in the region; to implement the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia and the Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone; and to promote the ASEAN Regional Forum for dialogue and cooperation with other countries and organizations. In this field, confidence-building measures should be enhanced on the basis of strict respect for the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, and of the preservation of the national and cultural identity of each country and of each region as a whole. Viet Nam and ASEAN, bilaterally or through the Regional Forum, will further promote efforts to develop a regional code of conduct on the South China Sea between ASEAN and China. We fully support the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on principles for resolving

disputes in the South China Sea, and we welcome recent positive developments on the Korean peninsula.

In order to implement the new major directives of the Millennium Summit and to follow up the momentum created by it, the General Assembly should, at this session, further enhance the process of reforming, revitalizing and democratizing the United Nations. Viet Nam supports the restoration and strengthening of the central position of the General Assembly, an organ that represents all Member States on the basis of sovereign equality. The reform of the United Nations — and most important, the reform of the structure, composition and decision-making process of the Security Council — is the responsibility of all Member States.

Reform of the Security Council should be based on the principles of the United Nations Charter. It should ensure increased representativeness, democracy and equitable geographical distribution, through which developing countries will be represented appropriately and will participate fully in the Council's decisions on important matters of world peace and security. Viet Nam supports expansion in both categories of Council membership, permanent and non-permanent. Regarding the increase in the permanent membership, the general package to be agreed upon should ensure that developing countries from the three continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America are represented; and it may also take into account the inclusion of some developing countries that can play a significant role and of certain developed countries that have made major financial and material contributions to the United Nations. Such countries would include India, Japan and Germany.

Now more than ever before, the United Nations must ensure that it can demonstrate the ability to reform itself and move forward with tangible steps. We need to act, and to ensure that the reform reflects the abundant vitality of the United Nations.

As it participates in this session, Viet Nam shares the common resolve to implement the historic Millennium Declaration to build a just and better world and a worthier and more effective United Nations. Fully aware of its responsibility as a Member State towards the United Nations and towards the international community, Viet Nam has for many years been making an effort to attain the common goals of mankind and of the United Nations, and it will continue to do so in the future. A very recent vivid example was the proposal put forward by the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam at the Millennium Summit, recommending that the first decade of the twenty-first century be proclaimed a decade of the greatest efforts towards development and poverty eradication.

In its capacity as a Member of the United Nations and as Chairman of ASEAN, Viet Nam will do its utmost to contribute actively to the development of the United Nations in general and of ASEAN in particular, and to promote cooperation between Viet Nam and the United Nations as well as between ASEAN and the United Nations. We wish at the same time to develop close and effective cooperation with other Member States and with organizations of the United Nations.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Billie Miller, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. Miller (Barbados): I join other delegations in congratulating Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland on his election to preside over the proceedings of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and on Finland's able service as Co-Chairperson of the Millennium Summit. My delegation's appreciation is extended also to the outgoing President, the Foreign Minister of Namibia.

I take this opportunity also to express the distinct pleasure of the Government of Barbados at the fact that another member of the fraternity of small island developing States, Tuvalu, has recently taken its place at our table.

Five short years ago, the United Nations celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a massive gathering of world leaders not much different from the event which engaged our attention for the better part of last week. Then as now, the report card was weighed; then as now, amid critical assessment of its deficiencies and calls for bold reform, the Organization's continued validity was ultimately recognized and its unique and inherently positive role in multilateral relations emphatically supported.

We hope that this time the Millennium Summit will have served as more than just a familiar echo reverberating, unchanged, at five-year intervals through these chambers, magnified among the myriad murmurs that linger from other occasions of

specialized summitry. For there is nothing inherently magical about the passing of a millennium, or a decade, or even a quinquennium. Indeed, the proliferation of "plus fives" in this place is enough to confound the entire fraternity of mathematicians and accountants. And none of us is totally confident that the final reckoning will leave us on the plus side of the ledger. On the contrary, it seems, sadly, that we have become consumed by the show, not the substance; the process, not the result; the plan, not the implementation.

In this, the last year of the second Christian millennium, as we review the progress of the peoples of the planet over the past century, we find that, on balance, humankind has not done very well. In many fundamental ways, the twentieth century has not lived up to the promises and expectations that an era marked by such far-reaching technological change and innovation should have produced. In contrast, it has ushered in a time of unprecedented violence and suffering, visited mainly upon innocent civilians by international and internal warfare fought with increasingly sophisticated and deadly weaponry.

The end of the ideological divide has not been followed by an era of peace and development, as we had all anticipated, but by a horrendous upsurge in genocidal, religious and ethnic conflicts. The threat of nuclear proliferation and biological warfare has only partially receded, and the scourges of terrorism, narco-trafficking and transnational crime continue to scar innocent lives and threaten democratic governance. While a few thousand souls live in obscene luxury, half of the world's population subsist on less than two dollars a day, and millions remain desperately poor, with no prospects of bequeathing a better life to their children. The new plague of the twentieth century, AIDS, continues its decimation, with disproportionate effects upon the poor in the developing world. In sum, our modern civilization has not evolved into a caring and enlightened species, but rather into one that has often abused the positive aspects of its heightened capacity and modernization to the detriment of humanity and of the earth.

We well know that the United Nations is not, and cannot be, the panacea for all the problems of the twenty-first century, but we are convinced that it can and should serve as a mechanism through which the Governments of the world, and their people, can work in common cause to find real solutions to the most pressing global problems and challenges. In our increasingly interdependent world, there is little chance of success for unilateral action. This applies equally to the Organization's mandates for the maintenance of international peace and security and those for the promotion of economic development and social progress.

Since the Organization's creation in 1945, the international landscape has changed considerably. Internecine and intra-territorial conflicts based on religious and ethnic differences have escalated, and the United Nations has seen its peacekeeping role used more in the last decade than ever before. At the same time, the effectiveness of that peacemaking and peacekeeping capacity has been called into question by international public opinion and Governments alike. We continue to expect miracles of the United Nations in ending the bloodshed in the most troubled corners of the world, but we seldom provide it with the tools, the financing and the appropriate mandate to allow for timely and decisive action. Without this support, United Nations peacekeeping efforts will remain reactive, and not preventive.

One of the most complex issues currently being debated in the context of an enhanced role for the international community in the maintenance of international peace and security is the clash between the opposing tenets of sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. My delegation believes that this is a matter of such fundamental importance that it requires in-depth discussion and the elaboration, by broad-based consensus, of clear new rules under international law. For while we do not believe that the international community can stand idly by in the face of massive and genocidal violations of the human rights of citizens by power-hungry tyrants, we must at the same time ensure that any international response to such situations is not influenced primarily by the national ambitions of third States.

Decisions must be based on clearly defined criteria, informed by an objective verification of the facts. Action must be confined to the saving of lives, not the overthrowing of Governments. Humanitarian intervention, however compelling the circumstances, must never be used as a guise for unwarranted interference in internal State governance.

The balance sheet for the twentieth century in the area of economic and social development is similarly mixed. While the United Nations, through its

specialized agencies and programmes, has made great strides in the fight against hunger, disease and deprivation, that progress has not been evenly distributed. The goal of the alleviation and ultimate eradication of poverty remains largely unfulfilled, with desperate consequences for the growing numbers of the world's population who live in extreme poverty. Structural adjustment, the errant compass of the so-called lost decade of the 1980s, has taken its heavy social toll. So, too, has the burden of debt, which, despite the promise of debt forgiveness for the least developed countries and special initiatives for the highly indebted poor countries, continues to constrain future economic prospects for a large number of developing countries. At the same time, the decline in official development assistance has had a direct impact on the most vulnerable sectors of society — I refer to women, children, the elderly and the infirm.

The Secretary-General has challenged the international community to set a target for the halving of the numbers of the population living in extreme poverty by 2015. For this to be achieved, there is an urgent need for a higher level of political will and a shared commitment to create the necessary social and economic framework to enable the poor and dispossessed to redirect their lives.

Education remains the most powerful tool for ensuring social progress and the betterment of living standards for the underprivileged. It is therefore one of the most disappointing truths of this closing century that the international community has failed in its collective endeavour to eradicate illiteracy, especially among children. Although in the developing world the adult literacy rate has increased by half, from 48 per cent in 1970 to 72 per cent in 1998, the information revolution now threatens to create a new category of functional illiterates. The eradication of illiteracy and the provision of at least primary basic schooling are eminently achievable goals.

As an engine of social mobility, education stands as the most important component in ensuring the success of an individual and of a society. It is the greatest social liberator and facilitator of peace and is one of the fundamental pillars supporting democracy, competitiveness and social stability.

The development of my country, Barbados, provides ample proof of how education can empower a people and foster upward mobility for each succeeding generation. Education has always been one of the highest priorities for the Government of Barbados and a major source of budget expenditure. We are one of the very few countries where access to education is free at point of delivery, mandatory up to 16 years of age and universal at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Currently, the Government of Barbados is embarked upon an ambitious programme within the schools known as EDUTECH 2000, which aims to ensure that every child is equipped to function successfully in the new information age.

As we approach the new century, the world faces probably one of the most disastrous threats to its sustainability, a threat which has ended the lives of an unimaginable number of persons, crippled the economies and threatened the productive workforce of southern Africa, and taken an increasing toll in Asia and in my own subregion, the Caribbean. I am referring to the pandemic of AIDS/HIV.

Current estimates indicate that there are over 33.4 million people worldwide who are now infected with the disease. In the Caribbean region alone, that figure numbers some 330,000, which is an astounding and frightening statistic to contemplate for a country like Barbados, with a population of 267,000 people. Our region has the highest prevalence per capita in the western hemisphere, and a prevalence second only to that of sub-Saharan Africa. It has been reported by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) that, every day, there are 16,000 new HIV infections and that 95 per cent of all reported AIDS cases occur in the developing world.

The AIDS pandemic is, in our view, the gravest economic and social crisis facing the global community as we enter the twenty-first century. Many of our leaders and policy-makers are only now beginning to grasp the enormity of the problem and to fully appreciate the devastating impact which AIDS is having, and will continue to have, on the economic sustainability of every country, from the smallest, most undeveloped nation to the largest, most economically viable State, because AIDS is not only a human and a social tragedy — it is also an economic one. It attacks our present workforce not only in its productive, but also in its reproductive capacity, thus simultaneously decimating the economic potential of two generations. It is a sobering reality that AIDS is now the leading cause of death among young men in the Caribbean, and it is projected that the disease may cause a decline in

the region's gross domestic product by as much as 4 to 6 per cent over the next decade.

We cannot tackle this grave crisis solely on the basis of current strategies and financial flows. Containing the spread of AIDS and dealing with its economic impact is an immediate priority which will require a major commitment of human and financial resources. In this regard, I am pleased to note the serious attention now being given to the crisis by the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and other international financial institutions. Just yesterday in Barbados, a major conference was convened under the auspices of the World Bank, UNAIDS, the Pan American Health Organization/WHO, the United Nations Development Programme, the Caribbean Community and the Canadian International Development Agency to bring together high-level Caribbean health, education, economic development and labour-policy makers to map out a new crisis strategy for the Caribbean region.

Barbados applauds the recommendations of the Secretary-General that the United Nations should adopt as an explicit goal the reduction of HIV-infection rates in persons 15 to 24 years of age by 25 per cent within the most affected countries before the year 2005 and by 25 per cent globally by 2010. The United Nations must make AIDS education and research a priority for the coming century. Determined leadership is needed to persuade Governments and international pharmaceutical companies that a partnership must be developed to combat the disease, both through research and through the provision of drugs at reasonable cost to those who are most in need.

The trafficking in and abuse of illegal drugs have paralysed the development of many of our societies. They have also eroded the productivity of the work force and led to social discord, violence and a conspicuous erosion of values and respect for the rule of law. The countries of the Caribbean have not remained untouched by this affliction, both as transhipment and, more recently, sadly, as consuming States.

In the fight against this menace, the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) has played a crucial role and its subregional office in Barbados deserves special mention for its active support for our own efforts. In Barbados, UNDCP assistance has been invaluable in the establishment of the Integrated Drug Programme through our domestic National Council on Substance Abuse and also in facilitating our community outreach efforts. Of particular note too, has been its role in the establishment of an Anti-Money Laundering Authority in Barbados.

As a small island developing State, Barbados is very aware that the natural environment performs for us free basic services without which human beings could not survive. At the same time, certain industrial and technological advances have threatened the biodiversity of many of the small island developing States. Therefore, for ecological reasons and for reasons of sovereignty and sustainable development, Barbados, on behalf of the Association of Caribbean States, last year launched an initiative leading to the adoption of resolution 54/225 on promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development. We are grateful for the recognition by the General Assembly of the efforts of the Caribbean to protect and preserve our most precious resource.

The functions of the Caribbean Sea are many and multi-layered. It is the source of our food, it is the main attraction which drives our tourism markets and it is our primary and most reliable link with the outside world. The destruction that would be caused if there were an accident involving nuclear waste or oil in our waters would be beyond catastrophic and it would take centuries for our environment to fully recover. We look forward to continued assistance from the international community in helping us to achieve the objectives of that resolution to maintain and protect this, our most vital natural resource. It remains the ultimate goal of the region to have the Caribbean Sea recognized as a special area within the context of sustainable development.

In this spirit, Barbados also welcomes the newly established United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Ocean Affairs and intends to be an active participant in the consultative process. We welcome the efforts of the General Assembly to address the problems of over-exploitation of living marine resources and the degradation of the marine environment.

The collective efforts of our Governments to alleviate poverty and disease and to help our human capital to take full advantage of the opportunities for

economic and social advancement take place within the parameters of a challenging new international order. Naturally, I refer to the phenomenon of globalization.

Globalization is not entirely new. It has existed in various incarnations among trading nations throughout history. What makes the modern incarnation different, however, is the manner in which the accompanying information revolution is making possible the integration of trade, investment, finance, production and services across national boundaries. What also distinguishes it is the philosophy of multilateralism, which offers all countries, developed and developing, a say — at least in theory — in shaping the rules which will henceforth govern international economic transactions. Nor is globalization as a concept inherently negative. The precepts of expanding market access, trade liberalization, increased technological advancement and more efficient and effective mechanisms of manufacturing and agriculture are all positive elements. It is in the rigid application of these elements, however, and their application without regard to the social dimension of development, that distortions have arisen which threaten to widen further the income gap between the developed and the developing worlds. I reiterate that the true challenge of the new multilateralism will be to ensure that globalization does not become an instrument of oppression for the peoples of the developing world, but, rather, becomes a means of offering a better life to all of our peoples.

In our efforts to sensitize the developed world to the need for adequate transitional measures for developing countries and for recognition of the special vulnerabilities of small economies, Barbados has frequently pointed to the fact that our Caribbean countries are being asked to undertake in 10 years a process which was carried out by the advanced industrialized societies over a period of more than 40 years, spread over eight rounds of multilateral trade negotiations between 1947 and 1994. In this regard, we have emphasized that, however clinically sound a procedure might be, the compression of its application into too short a time period can often be a fatal therapy. One of the greatest essential inequalities of the contemporary global economy is that, while the developed world was allowed an extended period over which to properly phase in trade liberalization, to its benefit, smaller, less endowed societies with less scope to absorb the shocks of adjustment are expected to make a potentially beneficial adjustment over an incredibly short period of time. It would not have worked for the developed world; it will not now work for the developing, and is in fact the consideration which argues the case for longer phase-in periods to apply the changes in the global trading regime.

Barbados is not opposed to globalization. We have already indeed begun the process of restructuring our economy and repositioning our society to meet that challenge. But our efforts, we believe, must be met by a similar display of good faith on the part of the World Trade Organization, which must, as my Government has repeatedly stated, review, repair and reform itself, adopt an ideology that is developmental and embrace a developmental agenda that is progressive and balanced in its substance, its processes and its outcomes.

That display of good faith is also necessary in promoting constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue between the industrialized countries and their developing country partners on the crucial matter of the regulation of international financial centres in their jurisdictions. My country has spoken extensively in other forums about our serious concerns over the unilateral manner in which the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has proceeded on its so-called harmful tax competition initiative, and on the real motives underlying this unfortunate move. The setting of international rules in the area of financial services cannot properly be done by a grouping of 29 countries to the exclusion of all other interested parties. In this age of enlightened multilateralism there is no place for the application of unilateral, extra-territorial solutions to international economic developments.

On balance, we must not allow our frustration at the many missed opportunities to obscure the fact that the twentieth century has produced much that is positive. As we look forward, in the words of the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Right Honourable Owen Arthur:

> "We face the prospect that the simultaneous operation of the enormous power of technological change, the dismantling of barriers to the movement of output, capital, ideas and skills, and the emergence of rules-based, consensus-driven institutions of global scope will create a new global society that is capable of affording development to all, and of putting the scourge of poverty behind us for ever. We will leave the

twentieth century and enter the twenty-first conscious of the dangers, but excited by the prospects."

The Acting President (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Rosario Green, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico.

Ms. Green (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My country is pleased at the election of Mr. Harri Holkeri to preside over the work of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. We are certain that, with his talent, ability and experience, the efforts of this extremely important Assembly session will be highly productive. My delegation would also like to extend its recognition to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab for his outstanding work as President of the Assembly at the session that has just concluded.

Last Friday, during the Millennium Summit, the leader of the Mexican nation, Ernesto Zedillo, stated his personal commitment and that of the Mexican people to the values and principles that sustain the activities of our Organization. Today, through me, the Mexican Government renews its willingness to continue working and participating constructively to strengthen the United Nations, the reason for those historic meetings. We will do this guided by our traditional policy in the multilateral arena: by encouraging dialogue, consensus, and unrestricted respect for international law. We will do this convinced, as well, that we must make good use of this opportunity to give renewed impetus to the United Nations, so that it can progress in solving the challenges that we confront, and can fulfil the goal of building, in this new century, a safer, more just and equal world for all. As the President of Mexico stated, we will do it confident that we Mexicans have the necessary foundation to do our share in achieving the targets contained in the report of the Secretary-General and the Millennium Declaration.

My country is convinced that the practice of democracy is indispensable for the development of nations and to guarantee respect for individual freedoms. But we are also sure that democracy is sustained by the sovereign will of its citizens and is, therefore, a domestic process that cannot be imposed from the outside, although, without a doubt, it can and must be nourished by international dialogue between countries and by the cooperation that can be provided by the United Nations.

Mexico is also convinced that, just as the predominance of democracy within the membership of our Organization is imperative, it is essential that relations between nations follow democratic practices as well, and that these, in turn, be reflected in organizations such as the United Nations that we, the peoples of the world, have created to organize our coexistence.

Today we find ourselves with an extraordinary opportunity to advance in that direction: to cover further ground in the democratization of our Organization; to achieve a level of democratization that allows the United Nations to successfully fulfil the mission with which we entrusted it in San Francisco, the validity of which we seek to renew today, a level of democratization that reinforces the legitimacy of our Organization and invigorates its initiatives, a level of democratization that supports the domestic processes that many of our countries are undertaking and will consequently be enriched by them.

Mexico has stated on various occasions that strengthening the General Assembly, the international community's most representative universal forum, is indispensable to guarantee the full democratization of the United Nations. We have also asserted that it is necessary to modify the structure and operation of the Security Council, so that it can fully shoulder its responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and international security.

It is for this reason that my country has repeatedly proposed that we undertake a profound reform of the Security Council; a reform that is not limited to modifications of its composition; a reform that also considers the Council's working methods and decision-making process; a reform that allows that important organ of the United Nations to reflect the plurality and diversity of our Organization; a reform that takes into account the transformations of the political landscape in recent times; a reform that does not lead to the creation of new centres of power and privilege; a reform that regulates and limits the scope of the veto, avoiding its abuse or selective application; a reform that institutionalizes the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly so that their links, contacts and exchanges of information are clearly regulated; in short, a reform that guarantees that the Security Council's decisions have the legitimacy that can come only from the universal assent of the General Assembly.

Based precisely on this unwavering faith in the universality of international law, which Mexico fully shares, my country has engaged in its most important battles in this world Organization. Mexico has always been ready to participate in codifying international law, but we have continually insisted that progress along this path should involve all of the countries that make up the community of nations. This is the only guarantee for preserving legality and for ensuring cordial, constructive and mutually beneficial relations between all of us.

The humanitarian crises in Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone, to refer to only a few recent cases, have made us reflect on the scope of and limits to current international law. These crises have made us see that it is imperative to find a balance between the urgent need to respond adequately to humanitarian emergencies and the need to respect the sovereign integrity of all States. These crises, in short, have alerted us to the need to transform ourselves into a true assembly that analyses and proposes new paths, and they have alerted us to what holds us back from becoming an authentic forum where different positions are heard and where answers that realistically reflect the possible consensuses are found.

We must therefore move forward and begin a process of further codifying our international law; a process based on the sovereign equality of States as a living reality, not just a theoretical principle; a process in which the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, and the small and the large can express themselves openly. A process that clearly establishes the rules of the game. A process that enshrines democracy as the only way in which to reach truly legitimate agreements.

Because we believe in these democratic values, Mexico has always opposed the legitimization, in practice, of any type of interference, especially when it is based on unilateral decisions or the decisions of a small group of countries. To the contrary, we have reiterated that the United Nations must be provided with a modern political structure that permits it to confront the new challenges to international peace and security brought by the end of the cold war. For this reason, we have insisted on the need to begin, as soon as possible, a broad process of consultation; a process that is absolutely democratic; a process that allows for the discernment of the mood of our community of nations in order to respond correctly and in timely fashion to humanitarian crises without weakening the Organization by doing so.

I call upon the President of the General Assembly to formally begin, as soon as possible, this broad process of consultation that will allow us to reflect together on this issue of crucial importance for the United Nations.

Mexico stands ready to continue contributing to the ongoing process of codifying international law to which I have referred. We will do so with the same confidence with which, in recent years, we have adhered to a significant number of international instruments proposed by this, our most important world Organization. We will do so with the same will with which we Mexicans have committed ourselves to modifying our national legislation in order to comply with the obligations that derive from those instruments. Such is our trust in international law and its advancement.

With this trust, only a few days ago my country signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With this trust we ratified, this year, the Convention on the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, as well as the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

With this trust, last week Mexico deposited its ratification instrument for the Kyoto Protocol. Some months ago, we did the same with regard to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

With that same trust, Mexico continues its fight to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons and tests, and reiterates the call made last April, by the group of countries, including Mexico, that are part of the new agenda for disarmament initiative, for the nuclear Powers to commit themselves to the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

Future generations deserve a world free of nuclear weapons. They deserve a world that is also free from the uncontrolled manufacture and trafficking of conventional arms. They deserve, without a doubt, a world where anti-personnel landmines cease to claim thousands of innocent lives.

Our commitment to the protection and preservation of the human race extends also to

combating the pandemics of our time. Today, a fatal disease, AIDS, threatens to cut off the existence of millions of beings on the planet. This is why only two days ago, the women Secretaries and Ministers for Foreign Affairs of 13 countries sent a letter to the Secretary-General in support of his call to stop and reverse the spread of AIDS by 2015 and to provide special assistance to children orphaned by this scourge. I want to renew the appeal of our 13 nations to all the Members of the United Nations to support the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and to resolutely launch the common efforts that are necessary to fight this global scourge.

As is well said in the report of the Secretary-General and in the Declaration of the Millennium Summit, the protection of our common environment, the fight against transnational organized crime, the promotion of human rights, attention to vulnerable individuals, including children, the fight for disarmament, and international aid to respond to the demands of the least developed countries — these are the foundation for allowing the people of the world to live not only free of fear and misery, but also with hope. These are also the challenges that our Organization and its Members must respond to, by consolidating an international architecture that is sustained by democracy and not by the concentration of power; an international architecture based on respect for international law, and not on unilateral decisions; an international architecture that encourages the universal character of our community and not selfish individualism; in short, an international architecture that emphasizes solidarity and cooperation as the values that give sustenance and permanence to the Organization.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Niels Helveg Petersen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

Mr. Petersen (Denmark): Allow me first to associate myself with the statement by my colleague, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the European Union. May I also congratulate you, Mr. Vice-President, and through you, President Holkeri, on your election to preside over this millennium Assembly.

A few days ago, leaders from all over the world gathered at the Millennium Summit. They gathered to reaffirm their faith in the Charter and to give direction to the United Nations in the twenty-first century. The Charter remains as relevant as ever with its mandate to promote peace and security, create an international community based on the rule of law, uphold respect for human rights and promote social development.

The new millennium brings new challenges to the United Nations in an ever more globalized world.

Increased communication between countries and peoples reinforces the need for common norms of social and economic behaviour. The global United Nations conferences within the last decade bear witness to the value of the United Nations as a unique norm setting forum. The follow up conferences to the social Summit in Copenhagen and the Beijing Conference on Women are cases in point.

These United Nations summits have advanced our understanding of the interaction between peace, development and human rights. The United Nations process on financing for development offers an opportunity for renewed commitment and action. The relationship between social development and promotion of human rights is today recognized. The best preventive action against conflict and strife is to ensure sound economic and social development based on good governance, respect for human rights and protection of minorities.

An encouraging and innovative feature is the decision adopted by the Economic and Social Council in July to establish a permanent forum on indigenous issues thereby advancing the aspirations of indigenous peoples. The Danish Government and the home rule Government of Greenland welcome this recent development. We will actively support the work of the permanent forum.

I welcome the fact that the Security Council has shown increasing attention to humanitarian issues. The open meeting in the Council on Africa in January gave new prominence to the humanitarian challenges for this continent. In the past year, the Council has taken up issues as diverse as AIDS in Africa, protection of civilians in armed conflicts and children in armed conflict. These initiatives increase our awareness of the root causes of conflict.

The international community must shoulder its responsibility in relation to the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS could seal the fate of more than 30 million Africans over the

next five years and epidemic undermines decades of development efforts and dissolves the social texture of nations. It could destabilize entire regions. The AIDS epidemic is not a local problem. It is a matter of security of global importance. Africa has enormous potential but millions continue to survive on less than one dollar a day.

The growing transfer of private capital rarely flows to the countries in Africa. We must do more to integrate Africa into the world economy. Trade opportunities must be improved. We must give free access to the markets of industrialized countries, as well as to products where African countries have a genuine competitive advantage.

The legal framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO) must take into account the special difficulties of developing countries. Trade-related technical assistance must be improved.

Peace and security, we know, are fundamental conditions for economic and social development. War, internal strife and political unrest have devastated large parts of Africa, causing untold human suffering and destruction. No one should expect easy solutions, but we must work together to prevent and resolve armed conflicts in Africa.

We witness an increased African effort in the field of peace and security. The international community must support this trend through our active involvement. We must assist in capacity-building by relevant African organizations, and by backing United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Africa itself must create the conditions for international involvement. We welcome the initiatives by the Security Council to create common ground for United Nations peacekeeping operations by inviting the parties involved to discussions and special sessions of the Council in New York.

Although the Camp David talks did not bring about an agreement in the Middle East, they represented a major step forward. They helped to narrow down differences on key issues. A breakthrough has never before seemed so close at hand. Time, however, is quickly running out. I urge the parties to seize this historic opportunity. I salute the political courage displayed by the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership in their efforts to achieve a durable solution. I welcome the recent decision by the Palestinian Central Council to defer the decision on the question of statehood in the interest of further negotiations.

Democracy is a peacemaker. Democracies are much less prone to violent conflicts. The Secretary-General recently called attention to what he called "fig leaf democracies". The fig leaf of elections does not by itself turn a dictatorship into a democracy. Elections can even lead to a backlash as frustrations rise and tensions turn into violence.

Denmark increasingly turns her efforts towards the prevention and management of violent conflicts in line with our comprehensive engagement in developing countries and active involvement in United Nations peacekeeping activities. We will strengthen this ability to react quickly and effectively.

We will also continue to support regional cooperation also when it comes to countering the uncontrolled spread of small arms. Landmines are substantial obstacles to development. Increased efforts by the United Nations, Governments and non-governmental organizations are necessary. Right now, new momentum is needed. The second meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention provides an important opportunity.

Peace operations are no longer a question of merely keeping the warring parties apart or monitoring ceasefires. They are a comprehensive and complex undertaking involving disarmament, demobilization of combatants, supervision of elections, monitoring of human rights and training of local police among others. We must enable the United Nations to adapt to the new realities, do things better and avoid such failures as happened in Rwanda. I fully support the recommendations in the Brahimi Report on United Nations peace operations. We must provide stronger political and financial support to the Organization. I welcome the proposed shift towards the use of civilian police and the rule of law, as I welcome the focus on rapid deployment of military and civilian personnel. Police and judicial experts are indispensable to rebuilding the economy in civil society, and their work must be based on a solid peace-building strategy. Close cooperation between the United Nations and other international organizations is called for. We must establish a partnership between the United Nations and regional actors.

Last year the Secretary-General called upon Member States to pursue more effective policies to stop

organized mass murder and violations of human rights. I fully support this view. We cannot leave large groups of people unaided where national authorities do not live up to their responsibilities. Conflicts in Kosovo and East Timor raise serious questions with regard to some of the classic principles of international law, the principle of State sovereignty, the principle of respect for human rights and the principle of the non-use of force in international relations. On the one hand, we had a basic rule of international law incorporated into the United Nations Charter — that the use of force in international relations is prohibited unless authorized by the Security Council or in self-defence. On the other hand, many countries find that there is a political and moral obligation to act in the face of atrocities causing large-scale human suffering within another State.

There is no clear-cut solution to this dilemma. But surely no legal principle, including sovereignty, can be used as a shield to commit crimes against humanity and other serious violations of human rights. The Security Council has a moral obligation to act on behalf of the international community. We must remember that the United Nations was founded, in the words of the Charter, in order "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights". Any intervention reflects a failure of prevention. As a last resort, the international community must have the ability to act in the face of organized mass murder or ethnic-cleansing, even if the Security Council is blocked. The challenge is to keep open the option of humanitarian intervention without Security Council authorization in extreme cases, but to do so without jeopardizing the international legal order.

We must ensure that the Security Council functions as effectively as possible. If not, the influence of the Council will be diminished. The permanent members of the Security Council should apply the right of veto only in matters of vital importance. Therefore, I reiterate my proposal to establish a procedural rule; a rule according to which a permanent member of the Security Council would have to state the reasons why it has decided to exercise its right of veto in a given situation. Furthermore, the Member State should state on which grounds it considers that matters of vital importance are at stake. I hope that this idea can be further developed and that it can gain broad support.

I have addressed new challenges and possibilities at the start of the new millennium. Let me end by reminding this Assembly that old challenges still need to be addressed. Weapons of mass destruction are a lethal legacy of the cold war. They need our continued attention. Certain States are still pursuing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and building a missile capacity. There is a need for further improvement of the international non-proliferation regimes. Peace, development and human rights have been the essentials in the work of the United Nations from the very beginning. They remain essential. The primary responsibility for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world rests with Governments, but the United Nations is here to help us. The Millennium Summit confirmed our common will to work together as truly united nations.

I cannot leave this Assembly without expressing my deep concern at the situation in Burma. The treatment of Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi is a disgrace, and I call on the regime in Burma to immediately restore Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom of speech, movement and communication.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Exactly one week ago, the Millennium Summit was held in this very Hall, in which more than 150 leaders, heads of State and Government took an active and interactive part.

This Summit, which my delegation wishes to salute once again, has played a great service in bringing together so many eminent personalities to truly take stock of the state of the world through a stark re-reading of the mission of and the basic strategic objectives assigned to the United Nations.

What more can be said? How can it be better said?

The conclusions arrived at by our leaders, which go to the very substance of the diverse and changing problems that undermine humanity, frame the items inscribed on the agenda of the fifty-fifth session. They also give us the opportunity to strike while the iron is hot and to embark immediately on their implementation where it is possible.

In that context, the general debate in progress is a real challenge; a challenge to stay the course, but also a challenge to our ability to get down to basics.

But before I go on, I wish to convey to the President, on behalf of my delegation, heartfelt warm congratulations on his election to the presidency of our Assembly. This election is a well-deserved tribute to him and his country, Finland, with which Burkina Faso enjoys an excellent relationship of friendship and cooperation.

My country is a Bureau member and we wish to assure the Bureau of our full willingness to cooperate with it.

Our congratulations also go to His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, on the effectiveness of his guidance of the previous session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to renew Burkina Faso's appreciation and support for the work of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who guides the work of our world Organization with courage, lucidity and determination.

The waning millennium will no doubt forever be etched in the memory of humankind. Unfortunately, it will be etched in blood, as during it we witnessed, as virtually powerless bystanders, the rise of slavery, colonization and racial discrimination; the escalation of the most atrocious kinds of war; the ongoing degradation of the environment; and the deterioration of the terms of trade. But it will also be etched in gold, for we witnessed prodigious scientific and technological progress and economic and industrial growth, even though the structure for sharing their fruits was slow moving and unfair.

No continent more than Africa, no people more than Africans, bear more heavily today the stigma of the scourges they have suffered, which will for ever mark them, or of their sharing but little — if anything — of the benefits of progress. My delegation therefore believes that we should embrace that history together and in a spirit of solidarity, agree to be the living and collective memory of it and learn its lessons so that we may strengthen our capacity to solve with greater efficiency and equity the problems of security, peace, development and a better quality of life that make up the core of our priorities. Whether that involves resolving the smouldering or open conflicts that continue to decimate our populations and to force them to flee by the thousands into exile, or whether it entails looking for lasting solutions to the problems of underdevelopment, the unbearable debt burden, the AIDS pandemic, malaria or natural and environmental disasters, we must, whatever the cost continually go back to our sources and history.

I therefore make a solemn appeal to the conscience of the peoples of the United Nations to prevent hegemony and domination from being the hallmark of our Organization during the third millennium. That would be a betrayal of this history, and make our collective memory a selective memory.

As the Assembly is aware, despite the progress made during the second millennium, there still remain questions and concerns among developing countries, particularly those in Africa. Their questions and concerns are not caused solely by the acceleration and unprecedented worsening of their continued impoverishment. Unfortunately, they also stem from the fact that today, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, international relations continue to be based essentially on force. That sad fact is made worse because, with the end of the cold war, we are passively and almost with a resigned attitude witnessing a single mind-set developing.

As most heads of State and Government have said from this rostrum, the time has come to undertake the necessary reforms at the national, regional and international levels to build a more just, equitable, unified and fraternal world. Let us hope that the basic challenge, I would even call it heroism, of the new millennium will be to move forward together in solidarity, calmly and democratically towards globalization while we remain ourselves — that is, retain our intrinsic values and our dignity as free individuals.

With regard to the United Nations, we are convinced that making it more democratic is absolutely necessary. That democratization must include a thorough reform of the decision-making processes of the system, and of the Security Council in particular, and should go hand in hand with giving greater attention to development issues, particularly through a more thorough examination of the idea of a development council, as proposed by the Millennium Summit. It also means making the Organization truly universal. In this regard, Burkina Faso welcomes the admission of Tuvalu as the 189th Member State. We also think it is unfair to continue to marginalize the Republic of China, a country that meets all the requirements of a sovereign State to take its place in the United Nations.

Throughout its history, and particularly since the 1990s, Burkina Faso, learning from its own experience — experience grounded in a culture of dialogue and negotiation — has based its contribution on the quest for solutions to national and subregional conflicts on the basis of dialogue and agreement. We have done so because we are convinced that dialogue and agreement — which are certainly not the weapons of the weak — are the only way to reach lasting peace.

We are therefore very surprised and disappointed that for some time now my country has been forced to confront accusations and all sorts of completely baseless recriminations. Is this the result of a deliberate desire to harm, or simply of misunderstanding? It is wrong and unfair that in efforts to find lasting solutions to conflicts one should yield to the easy temptation of accusation, recrimination, condemnation and exclusion. Burkina Faso has never hesitated to demonstrate its good faith, to show its willingness to cooperate with the United Nations and the international community, or to express its desire for transparency.

That is why we set up an inter-ministerial committee on Angola and Sierra Leone to follow up and monitor implementation of the sanctions decreed by the Security Council. We also invited the Council to undertake any investigations in Burkina Faso that it deemed necessary to find the truth. Two United Nations delegations therefore recently visited the country. Their leaders stated that they had accomplished their missions freely and peacefully.

Similarly, in the face of the recent surprising, to put it mildly, allegations by Guinea, we would like to reassure that beloved, fraternal country, as well as the international community, that Burkina Faso had no part, directly or indirectly, in those unfortunate events. We repeat our readiness to welcome or support any initiative that could shed light on this matter, which we find profoundly distressing.

At the national level, Burkina Faso is resolutely continuing to consolidate and anchor the democratic process begun in 1990. That process is essentially characterized by the regular and systematic holding of elections at the municipal, legislative and presidential levels, in objective, transparent and fair conditions recognized by the international community; the strengthening of public freedoms and the promotion of human rights; public financing of political parties, unions and an independent press; recognition of official status for the opposition; reform of the judicial system to allow it to play its full role in consolidating and regulating the rule of law; and strengthening decentralization and local governance.

Turning to the economy, our Government is concentrating on a truly unified type of development. Its priorities are poverty eradication, environmental protection, food self-sufficiency, and education and health for all.

We welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, which seeks to reduce the debt of poor, highly indebted countries, and the election of our country to that body, which strengthens our anti-poverty strategy.

At the African level, Burkina Faso has consistently worked to strengthen good-neighbourly relations and to promote subregional and regional integration as well as peace and security.

That is why we are committed to the institutional stability and the strengthening of the subregional cooperation or integration organizations of which we are a member, in particular the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Sahel-Saharan States. We hope that the latter will be accorded the status of observer at the United Nations.

For that reason we have spared no effort to help create the African Union, which the African peoples so fervently desired.

These are the main ideas that Burkina Faso wanted to share with the international community and which attest to our unswerving commitment to the ideals of the United Nations and to our unshakable faith in our common ability together to forge a better future — a glorious future for the whole of humankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Sid Ahmed (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, I should like to congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri on his election to the presidency of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. We are confident that his personal qualities and his extensive political and diplomatic experience are an excellent

guarantee of the success of this session. I should like to assure him of the full cooperation of our delegation in this lofty task.

I should like also to seize this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, for the outstanding way in which he guided the work of the previous session. I pay tribute also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. We deeply appreciate his efforts to reform and restructure the Organization as well as to develop its methods of work and rationalize its role in all domains so that it meet the needs and challenges of today.

In this respect, we listened closely to the Secretary-General's presentation of his report on the work of the Organization. It is also my pleasure to welcome Tuvalu as a new Member of the Organization. We are prepared to cooperate fully with it in order to achieve the objectives of our Organization.

The reform and restructuring process of the United Nations bodies has become a necessity for the common interest. The conditions in which the United Nations was founded more than 50 years ago have changed, and major developments have taken place in all fields and at all levels, making it essential to review the methods of work and structure of the Organization.

For that reason, we support the expansion of the Security Council, in keeping with the principles of transparency and justice, so as to achieve equitable geographic representation and to reflect the universality of the Organization, in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter.

This session is being held at the dawn of the third millennium, at a time when the majority of humanity is living in conditions that prevent them from realizing their aspirations. Despite some encouraging indicators in some of the third-world countries, the general trend is towards a wider gap between the industrialized world and the developing one, which is facing major obstacles such as external debt, low prices for their commodities, and the difficulty of accessing world markets.

Our Organization should exert all possible efforts to alleviate the economic and social difficulties confronting the developing countries. It must help them accelerate their development in an effective manner by increasing official development assistance and by allowing more direct foreign investments into these countries and the opening of the markets of the developed countries to the products of developing ones, all of which will contribute to the establishment of a new world order based on consensus, cooperation and solidarity among all States.

The problem of debt must also benefit from the attention and the interest of the international community, because it is an obstacle to the economies of the developing countries. In this respect, my country hopes that the initiative undertaken to alleviate the debt of highly indebted and poor countries will contribute to the solution of this problem.

The world today is facing numerous problems and challenges, the effects of which are not contained by national boundaries. They jeopardize international security and undermine the achievements registered in all fields. Thus it is our duty to work relentlessly to resolve these problems. They include, to give but a few examples, terrorism, poverty and violations of human rights.

In this respect, my country wishes to reaffirm its condemnation of the phenomenon of terrorism, in whatever form and whatever its origin. We call for the reinforcement of cooperation and consultation at the international level in order to face this phenomenon with determination.

There is also a need to put in place policies and adopt measures to combat poverty, in order to ensure sustainable development. My country has created a commission entrusted with combating poverty and with implementing concrete programmes aimed at preparing our citizens to play a role in development. This commission is also responsible for guaranteeing the promotion of individual and collective rights.

In this context, I would like to recall the special session of the General Assembly on social development, held in Geneva last June, which reaffirmed and stressed once again the Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995.

We hope that the outcome of that special session will contribute to an improvement in the living conditions of all people and to the attainment of sustainable development by strengthening the links between social issues and development.

We express our satisfaction at the outcome of last June's special session of the General Assembly,

"Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", and we hope it will enhance the role played by women in all spheres.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is founded on good-neighbourly relations, peaceful coexistence and strengthening regional and international cooperation. In line with those principles, my country attaches great importance to consolidating stability and eliminating the causes of conflict and tension that can threaten international peace and security and hamper development in many regions of the world.

Turning to the Middle East, my country, while reaffirming its support for the peace process, considers that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region can come about only on the basis of the Madrid agreements, the principle of land for peace, and the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) to ensure complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories and from the Syrian Golan and the restoration to the Palestinian people of their legitimate national rights, foremost among them the right of self-determination and the right to the establishment of an independent State with the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. This requires us to intensify our efforts to overcome the obstacles to peace in the region, a region that so sorely needs a chance to realize its potential and to turn a new page in the history of its peoples. In that context, we note with satisfaction the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

We hope that efforts to bring stability and understanding to the Gulf region will be successful. My country reaffirms its respect for and adherence to international legitimacy, and reiterates its rejection of anything that could impinge on the independence or territorial integrity of Kuwait, as well as its rejection of any measure that would threaten the unity or territorial integrity of Iraq. We call for an end to the embargo imposed against the Iraqi people, who have suffered immensely from that embargo; it is children, women and the elderly who have suffered most.

On the question of the Arab Maghreb, my country is working staunchly and resolutely in cooperation with our sister countries in the Arab Maghreb Union to strengthen cooperation and consultation to realize the aspirations of the people of that region.

On Western Sahara, my country reaffirms its readiness to make every effort to promote the implementation of the United Nations settlement plan for that conflict.

Turning to developments in the Lockerbie crisis, we wish to express our satisfaction at the progress towards a comprehensive settlement, including the suspension of the embargo imposed on Libya. We welcome the success of the diplomatic approach, and we hope that this problem will be resolved once and for all.

We are concerned about the ongoing conflict in Somalia, and we hope that our Somali brothers will agree to engage in constructive dialogue in a spirit of responsibility and patriotism with a view to a peaceful settlement and to restoring unity and national sovereignty to the country so that it can once more enjoy stability and a climate of conciliation.

We regret the continuing tension in Sierra Leone, and hope that ongoing efforts will bear fruit, so that that country, which for nine years has been suffering in a destructive war, can once again enjoy stability and a climate of conciliation.

On the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we reaffirm our support for the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, which in our view is the only acceptable framework for a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution.

With respect to Angola, my delegation reaffirms its full support for Security Council resolutions 864 (1993), 1127 (1997) and 1173 (1998), and calls upon UNITA to fulfil its commitments under the Lusaka Protocol so that peace and security may return to that country.

Turning to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, we express our satisfaction at the ceasefire achieved thanks to the efforts of President Abelaziz Bouteflika of our sister country the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. We hope that the negotiations between the parties will result in a final solution to that conflict.

On Kosovo, my country expresses its satisfaction at the positive developments towards ending the violence, restoring confidence and rebuilding the country after many years of war.

The United Nations was established to attain the common purposes of all mankind, notably international peace, security and stability. The text of the Charter contains the provisions necessary to ensure a balance between the rights and the duties of all those wishing to serve the common interests of international society. That is why, at the dawn of the third millennium, we must spare no effort to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Iaia Djaló, Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Communities of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Djaló (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): I wish at the outset to convey my warm congratulations to Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session and to reaffirm our confidence in his ability to guide our work at this session. The delegation of Guinea-Bissau, which it is my privilege to head, assures the President of its full cooperation. Our congratulations go also to his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who fulfilled his mandate in a constructive manner, thus making an important contribution to the work of the General Assembly.

We wish also to express our trust and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to thank him for the important steps that have been taken on his initiative towards substantive reform of the United Nations and towards bolstering the Organization's international credibility.

The universality of the United Nations gains whenever a new Member State is admitted. By joining the United Nations, Tuvalu has affirmed to the international community that it will shoulder responsibility for the full exercise of its sovereignty. Its accession to membership has reinforced the representative nature of this world forum.

In the third millennium, with our eyes focused on a new century, we are passing through a historic period in which new and significant events give rise to new hopes on the international scene.

This diagnosis, however, encompasses both hope and scepticism, for it shows that the transitional period we are living through involves factors of both integration and disaggregation.

If, on the one hand, the end of bipolarism that dominated international relations diminished ideological antagonisms, this new and unprecedented process, by undoing old political and strategic balances, is promoting democratic impulses, freeing the energy of States and creating space for a new international order more in line with our times.

On the other hand, the rise of nationalist aspirations, supported by the yearning for the right to free evolution, has had the effect of triggering old conflicts, some of them forgotten in time. This phenomenon has led to an exponential growth of conflicts that menaces the internal cohesion of States as well as international peace and security.

It was predicted, and legitimately so, that the international economy would be able to take advantage of the peace dividend resulting from the end of the arms race. It had been expected that those resources would be invested in the poorest countries and, thus, would have contributed to the acceleration of global economic growth and development. Our perception, however, is that, due to the present state of international economic relations, those optimistic expectations have not come to fruition.

As the international balance of power has changed, the relative position that placed different countries in the international, political and economic pecking order has also changed. The very nature of relations among States has also been transformed. However, the rules and practices giving structure to a new international order are yet to be defined. Our perception is that this is the main unresolved issue. This calls for the community of nations, through our common institutions, to work determinedly together in order to bring the present transition to a successful end.

To do so, it will be essential to empower the system of collective security embodied in the United Nations. In particular, we attach great importance to the revitalization of the General Assembly and the rationalization of its agenda. We also feel there is a need to reform the Security Council so that that organ, which has special responsibilities, will be able to fulfil its original mission and be reborn as the main political instrument for action in the United Nations.

Expectations without precedent devolve upon the United Nations. We should all strive to find a solution to the present structural and financial crises faced by the Organization. It will be necessary to reactivate its

dynamism in order to implement the "Agenda for Peace" and to make the "Agenda for Development" a reality.

It is widely known that Guinea-Bissau has just overcome the gravest crisis the country has experienced in its recent history. We are still convalescing from the terrible effects of an absurd and disastrous war. In addition to irreparable loss of life, Guinea-Bissau society was deeply traumatized by a conflict that almost destroyed the entire existing infrastructure. Guinea-Bissau was made more impoverished and more vulnerable. Its reconstruction, the foundations of which are fragile, will be very difficult, because even simple tasks have assumed urgent priority. The urgency and the sheer volume of the effort needed to rebuild the country go far beyond the limited possibilities of a Government that is near exhaustion. In order to succeed, that effort will need to be supplemented by the effective participation of every partner of Guinea-Bissau.

In this new period of the restoration of democratic legality, the people of Guinea-Bissau have elected their new Government within the framework of a pluralist democracy. The new National People's Assembly has approved a general programme of action, prepared by the Government, which defines a strategy for sustainable development aimed at implementing the priorities identified, in cooperation with Guinea-Bissau's partners. This programme of action and the project of building a new society, required by the evolution of the situation in Guinea-Bissau, have been set out by Guinea-Bissau's new President, who was freely elected by the people. Aware of the sacred responsibility incumbent upon him, President Kumba Yalá has committed himself to upholding the programme of action.

As on past occasions when we were beneficiaries of timely and precious solidarity extended by the international community, we are hopeful that the political, economic and social progress of Guinea-Bissau will be further supported and maintained.

Amilcar Cabral, the founder of our nation, considered himself and the other Guinea-Bissau freedom fighters to be combatants for the noble causes upheld by the United Nations. Today, after the heroic struggle that led to our independence, and thanks also to the support received from the international community and the United Nations, Guinea-Bissau is participating in the highest world diplomatic forums with serenity and determination, embarking on an unrelenting search to improve on the heritage of our forebears.

Therefore, acting with responsibility and specificity, Guinea-Bissau has undertaken its own initiatives, as well as presenting proposals aimed at the defence of its interests and at contributing to the advancement of the causes of peace and international cooperation. We recognize that in today's international situation, rife with conflicts and contradictions, the United Nations remains, without a doubt, the necessary forum for the development of the activities undertaken by our Government to affirm the international presence of Guinea-Bissau.

The five African Portuguese-speaking countries, joined with Brazil, Portugal and Timor Lorosae — the latter still being an observer — to form the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. This Lusophone Community is characterized by solidarity and tolerance, based upon shared sentiments and perceptions rooted in a melding of cultures that expresses the experience of our respective peoples.

We would like to salute the development in the processes of democratization of Government structures that is now occurring in Sao Tome and Principe, Mozambique and Cape Verde, similar to what happened in Guinea-Bissau. This will allow our Governments to better respond to the legitimate aspirations of our peoples.

We wish to express our solidarity with the Angolan Government and people, which have experienced the nightmare of almost 40 years of war. We support the efforts in search of peace and national reconciliation. We strongly favour the implementation by the United Nations of the Lusaka Protocol and the full implementation of the sanctions established by the Security Council.

In our West African subregion, Guinea-Bissau has tried, and to a certain extent has attained, in terms of its will for integration, a political commitment aimed at improving our relations with neighbouring countries so as to promote the cause of peace. In this spirit, we recognize that in its essence the conflict of Casamance is an internal issue of Senegal. As such, we also perceive its negative consequences on the neighbouring States. Our country is ready to work in the search for a just solution to and peaceful resolution of that conflict.

We feel, however, that we are neither a part of the problem nor its source of origin. The constructive actions undertaken by Presidents Kumba Yalá of Guinea-Bissau and Wade of Senegal, with the support of President Jammeh of the Gambia, allow us to look with optimism to the future evolution of that issue.

We deeply deplore the tragedy that has befallen Sierra Leone, a country of our subregion. The increased violence in that country has resulted in a humanitarian disaster. We urge the belligerent factions and the Government of Sierra Leone to cooperate with the international community in order to find a definitive solution to that fratricidal conflict.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Great Lakes region continues to be a source of concern to Guinea-Bissau. It is necessary to summon the political will of the countries of the region to diminish the tension and to continue to search for a just solution.

The Lusaka accords are the result of the perseverance of the parties involved and should be implemented rapidly and comprehensively. They are the essential framework for the resolution of the conflict. We are convinced that the implementation of Security Council resolution 1291 (2000), which established the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, represents the road to peace.

In the Horn of Africa, Guinea-Bissau welcomes the acceptance by Ethiopia and Eritrea of the peace plan put forward by the Organization of African Unity. We encourage both parties to persist on the path of dialog and negotiation and to continue to cooperate with our continental organization.

In the immediate vicinity of our continent, the Middle East peace process is entering a decisive period. This process and the quest for equanimity should be accelerated in order to ensure a lasting and just peace that respects the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent State of its own, as well as the right of all States of the region, including Israel, to national independence.

Far from the African continent, Guinea-Bissau continues to pay special attention to the issue of East Timor. We are linked to that territory by special historic and cultural bonds and we are therefore closely following the work of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor and the recent establishment of a transitional Government. We hope that the process will culminate in the full independence of Timor Lorosae and with its admission as a full Member of the United Nations.

Finally, we believe that the situations created by the imposition of embargoes against certain countries, in which sanctions affect the poorer sectors of the populations, particularly women and children, should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation with a view to finding a definitive solution.

In the age of globalization, we should not lose sight of the human being and its vital needs. If it is legitimate that all parties have the right to expect profit from progress, it is also correct that we should seek economic growth with social equity. Mankind faces many challenges, among which achieving comprehensive development is without doubt the most important, because the lack of development is the main source of the conflicts that lead to the crises afflicting our planet. Therefore, if we wish globalization to live up to its promise, we should learn better to work and to act together in order to correct its negative effects.

It is urgently necessary to give momentum to the North-South dialogue on the basis of equality and to develop a wide network of South-South cooperation with a view to minimizing the risks of globalization. That effort must be fully supported by the international community with a view to a true partnership for development. Such partnership, in our view, should enable us to find the modalities of a coherent international action to ensure sustainable economic growth in the context of true development.

The structural adjustment policies adopted by the majority of African countries are, per se, clear proof of their willingness to improve the management of their national economies. Nevertheless, in most cases, the response of our development partners has not been in line with the sacrifices demanded and the urgency of the problems identified. From our point of view, it is necessary to identify the mechanisms needed to promote a true social adjustment, keeping the human individual as its central point of reference.

In this context, the collective challenge we face is to stress a dynamic image of international solidarity, which may be translated into effective action for social and economic cooperation in favour of developing countries.

Our gathering here at the General Assembly represents the best opportunity to correct the imbalances that destabilize the global process. We need to muster the determination of all our countries in order to raise relations among States to the high level of dignity required by our shared future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait to the General Assembly this morning contained a distortion of facts that requires a reply.

First of all, concerning the issue of those missing in action, the Kuwaiti Minister attempted to politicize the matter and to confine it exclusively to missing Kuwaitis. He claimed that the Iraqi Government refuses to participate in the meetings of the Tripartite Commission, whereas the facts of the matter are as follows.

First of all, the matter of the missing in action — be they Kuwaitis, Iraqis or of other nationalities — is a humanitarian issue that should not be exploited to cheap political ends, such as that of maintaining the embargo against the Iraqi people. While Kuwait has fewer than 600 persons missing in action, Iraq has more than 1,150, whose files are with the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Kuwaiti Government is expected to submit information concerning those missing persons. The Kuwaiti Government is called upon to put an end to the suffering of all the families that do not know the fate of their sons, regardless of their nationality, for human suffering knows no nationality.

Secondly, the work of the Tripartite Commission concerning missing persons is hampered by the United States of America and the United Kingdom, which insist on participating in its meetings despite the fact that they are not concerned with its work nor do they have any missing nationals whose fate they would be interested in learning about. However, the United States does have one missing person, a pilot whose plane was shot down over Iraqi territories during the aggression against Iraq in 1991. The United States has not asked that the case of this missing pilot be dealt with within the Tripartite Commission, but rather requested to deal with it on a bilateral level under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Once again we wish to affirm that Iraq endeavours to have the Tripartite Commission meet as soon as possible with the participation of the parties that do have persons missing in action — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq — under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Kuwaiti Minister claims that the Iraqi Government has not yet complied with the resolutions of the Security Council, neglecting the fact that Iraq has indeed complied with those resolutions, whereas his own Government has been violating those resolutions on a daily basis. All relevant United Nations resolutions have called for respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Iraq. Yet ever since 1992 scores of American and British planes have been taking off daily from bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to bombard Iraqi civilian targets, in blatant violation United Nations resolutions, international law and humanitarian international law. We call upon Kuwait to end that aggressive attitude, which represents a serious threat to the security and stability of Iraq and the States of the region.

Thirdly, the Kuwaiti Minister claimed that Iraq's intentions towards Kuwait are not peaceful. But the facts do indicate that Kuwait's intentions and actions towards Iraq are aggressive. Kuwait chooses to ignore the facts of history and geography and the collective opinion of the international community, including the Arab States. More than one speaker has affirmed such an opinion, when the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Arab States have asked in this very Assembly that the sanctions against Iraq be lifted in order to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people. Those who prevent the termination of the inhumane sanctions against the Iraqi people are, in fact, the masters of the Kuwaiti Government — the Americans and the British, who are interested in carrying out their own political programme without respect for international legitimacy.

Mr. Flores (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to refer to the mentions made this

morning to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla and to other parts of Spanish territory in the speech that was made to the plenary by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco, a country with which Spain maintains and wishes to continue maintaining excellent relations based on sincere friendship, good-neighbourliness, respect and a rich shared history of which we are proud.

In underlining the excellency of our relations and the importance that my country attaches to them, I repeat that the cities of Ceuta and Melilla and the adjacent islands are an integral part of Spanish territory, whose citizens are represented in the Spanish Parliament with exactly the same status and under the same conditions as the rest of their compatriots.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation listened attentively to the response of the representative of Iraq to the statement of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kuwait, and I find it really difficult not to refute some of the contradictions in his response. I find it necessary to clarify the facts that are already known to most Member States and further to reiterate them.

First, regarding the issue of the Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees, Iraq has boycotted the work of the Tripartite Commission, which is chaired by the International Committee of the Red Cross, since December 1998. This is not the first time Iraq has boycotted the Committee's work. Regarding the participation of the countries of the alliance — the United Kingdom, the United States and France — they have participated in the work of the Commission as a result of an agreement concluded by the parties concerned — Iraq, Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — in Riyadh in 1999. The agreement spells out the composition of the Commission and its modus operandi. Iraq is regrettably trying to pull out of that agreement and to renouncing it. Iraq is required by Security Council resolutions 686 (1991), 687 (1991) and 1284 (1999) to resume its participation in the works of the Tripartite Commission and its subcommittee and to cooperate with the high-level international coordinator, who was appointed by the Secretary-General in order to facilitate the solution of this humanitarian problem.

What Kuwait is asking for is implementation of the Security Council resolutions and serious and constructive cooperation to solve this problem on a purely humanitarian basis, not linked to any other political issues. What Iraq is doing is linking its participation in the Tripartite Commission to the non-participation of the countries of the Alliance.

Secondly, regarding the missing Iraqi persons, despite our information that Iraq has pushed this issue in order to create confusion and divert attention from the main problem — the issue of Kuwaiti and third countries' prisoners or detainees — Kuwait has agreed, for humanitarian reasons, to consider and study any files that Iraq might submit. Kuwait has also cooperated seriously with the Tripartite Commission and has expressed its readiness to receive any committee that might be established to visit prisons or any other places that this committee might deem suitable inside Kuwait.

There is a specific mechanism for considering all the files, adopted and approved by all the parties. There is also a timetable that was agreed to during the meetings of the Tripartite Commission and its technical subcommittee. If Iraq were keen to know the fate of the missing Iraqi persons, why did it not attend the meetings of the Commission?

The fact of the matter is that the issue of the Iraqi missing persons is not mentioned in any of the resolutions of the Security Council. This is in contrast to the issue of Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees, which is an integral part of the obligations of Iraq, obligations that Iraq is expected to fully meet.

Thirdly, regarding Iraq's allegations vis-à-vis Security Council resolutions, Kuwait is not the only country that says that Iraq has not fully implemented Security Council resolutions. The Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-aligned Movement, and the Security Council — all such regional and international organizations have called on Iraq to implement the resolutions of the Security Council. This can be seen in paragraph 54 of the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization, from which His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait quoted in his speech.

Kuwait is not responsible for the embargo and the sanctions regime. The Security Council is the sole and only body that has the authority to lift or maintain the sanctions. Kuwait is not a member of the Council. Kuwait is a small country and does not have such influence on all the Council members that it can force maintenance or extension of the sanctions.

The meeting rose at 7.25 p.m.